

# **Ankle problems 2014-17 – updated 24/01/20**

## **Concerns about left ankle fusion scheduled for 22 August 2014**

This document started as preparation for talking to Claire Stevens, my consultant orthopaedic surgeon's right-hand woman, after I had been offered a fusion on my left ankle, which had been giving me increasing trouble for some time. Things changed rather dramatically after that offer, so I have kept this going as a diary of subsequent developments – and inevitably – a lot of personal and family stuff apart from ankle problems.

### **Notes written prior to contacting Claire Stevens**

I was so amazed by Mr Milner's offer of an operation as early as the 22 August that I forgot to mention the problem I have with my right knee. This has been weak and moderately painful for at least a year, making ascending and descending stairs difficult and painful but not affecting walking much. I have tried using crutches to walk without using the left leg, which will be necessary after the operation this is okay, but getting up from a chair using the right leg and the crutches is very difficult and painful. I have been exercising both knees equally by rising and sitting ten times once or twice a day, and 16 flex-and-extend repeats in bed before getting up, and have noticed some improvement on stairs. However, if the post-operation rehabilitation is prolonged it is going to be a serious ordeal.

Mr Milner's information sheet suggests that my left leg could be in plaster for as long as twelve weeks. Having had the same leg in a full-length cast with no weight-bearing for only six weeks following a quadriceps-tendon repair in summer 2008, I find this a really daunting prospect. How big will the cast be for the fusion – below the knee? Will any weight-bearing be allowed before the plaster comes off, and if so how soon typically?

(There is an update on ankle fusion rehabilitation in the section below for Tuesday 16 September.)

Remembering how uncomfortable I was in a cast during hot weather, I wonder if I would be better having the operation in winter or spring next year. This would also give me longer to strengthen the right knee with exercise.

I have also been exercising both ankles in bed every morning, with 16 repeats each of flex-and-extend and clockwise and anti-clockwise rotations. I have noticed a considerable improvement in the left ankle, which had become very painful and quite weak before I first visited the GP. I am able to manage 45-60 minutes walking the dog every morning (every day since he arrived in mid-December), provided I wear a neoprene sports support and lace my walking boots tightly. I walk to the local shops (about 10 minutes each way) wearing just trainers several times a week and walk around two local markets for up to an hour almost every week. I have noticed that all these walks are much easier now than they were before I started the exercises.

This leads me to ask whether the ankle is actually bad enough at present to justify the fusion. If the replacement had been a possibility I would have jumped at the chance, given how successful my right ankle has been, but the fusion is a less attractive proposition.

The information sheet mentions a stick and/or a plastic splint among the alternatives to surgery. Having made considerable progress with exercise and having also read the scary bits about possible complications (I am 71!), I would prefer to continue the exercises and explore the alternatives before surgery.

## **Call from Claire**

I texted Claire and received a call from her on Friday 4 July 2014. She was very sympathetic to my position and said it would be no problem to take me off the list for surgery. She said she would speak to Mr Milner on Monday 7 July (his next outpatient clinic day) and then phone the Occupation Therapy team at Bassetlaw hospital to ask whether they would see me with a view to providing a suitable ankle support (she had ruled out Orthotics because the Derby department has a very long waiting list). If they could not deal with a referral from Derby she would talk to the Derby OT team.

## **Diary what happened next**

### **Tuesday 8 July 2014**

I have not yet heard back from Claire.

### **Sunday 6 July 2014**

For a number of reasons we had decided that George, our dog, needed to be found a new home, and he was handed over to new owners on Saturday 5 July. We are both heartbroken to lose him but agree that this is the best course for both George and ourselves. He needs a younger family who will give him more time and exercise; I need relief from the long daily walks; and we need more freedom to visit family and generally get more time for recreation away from home. At this point I am still having regular crying sessions, but am feeling less fatigue and less pain in my ankle.

## **Exercise regime**

### ***Ankles and knees in bed***

Before getting up, I lie on my back and hang my feet over the end of the mattress. I then do 16 repeats of extending and flexing both ankle joints, followed by 16 repeats of inward and outward rotations of both ankles together. This is followed by 16 repeats of leg lifts with both legs, flexing and extending the knees as fully as possible; lying on my front and flexing and extending both knees together; and sitting on the edge of the bed to lift both legs to full extension. I often do this routine when I have awoken very early and then try to get back to sleep!

### ***Other exercises***

When sitting on my recliner armchair, I extend both knees fully and hold them in the locked position for a few seconds, again repeating 16 times. When sitting normally, I stand and sit with no assistance from arms – initially 10 times but now 16 times. I have also started standing facing a wall, placing my hands flat on the wall and lifting my heels as high as I can – a more risky weight-bearing exercise for the bad ankle but one which has so far caused little discomfort even after 16 repeats..

### ***Benefits***

I am already climbing and descending our spiral staircase with far less discomfort and with less support from my hands, though I still have to pull with my left hand when stepping up on the right leg – I don't think I'm lifting any weight off the ankle but it's more a matter of dealing with the tight turns on the stairs. I can even get up and down carrying our heavy Sebo vacuum-cleaner without too much strain. I am working towards going up and down 'no-hands' – something I have not been able to do for quite a long time. The aim is to normalise walking and using stairs as far as possible, gradually increasing the number of repeats for each exercise.

## **Update 17 July 2014**

Two days ago I checked and found that my pre-operation appointment was only two weeks away and I hadn't received a cancellation letter. Also, nothing from Claire or either Derby or Bassetlaw OTs. So I texted her on the 15 July and she phoned back to reassure me that the wheels were in motion but were slowed down by people's holidays. Apparently Mr Milner didn't yet know about my decision! She had been in touch with Bassetlaw but they hadn't got back to her; she would ring again and if she got no joy she would set the wheels in motion in Derby.

Meanwhile I have been experimenting with my Dad's ancient walking stick and have got the rhythm right now. I've also been using the neoprene support more, made more acceptable with talcum powder, and I don't think there's any doubt that a suitable splint would be really beneficial.

George left us on the 10 July and, after a week to get over dogwalker's fatigue, I've started my 5-days-a-week 30-minute walks, which are going well.

## **Update 24 July 2014**

Things have settled down now. We still miss George very much but are enjoying the freedom we've gained. At the end of last week I phoned Fred, the trainer who found George his new home, and he said he was doing very well in his new family. We would be welcome to visit Fred's group obedience class to watch George any time, and he even offered to bring him over for a visit. We decided that neither of these could be anything but heartbreaking, and that a clean break was the only option. We just have to trust Fred.

My legs and feet have been more painful in the past few days, so I have stopped the sit-stand and heel-lift exercises – maybe I've been overdoing them a bit. Still no news about OTs or orthotics.

This is the Thursday of my second 'normal walking' week, which could also have something to do with my painful legs and feet. I've been pushing fairly hard, walking my old pre-George Hodsock Lane route for exactly 16 minutes, then turning back. Every day this week I've got home a few seconds before the 32-minute mark, in spite of the fact that the homeward journey has two uphill stretches, which are of course downhill on the way out. I generally feel better straight after the walk, but things deteriorate during the day, perhaps with the odd jobs I do (like manhandling our heavy petrol mower around the lawn and going up a ladder to deadhead the Buddleia!). I'm looking forward to the weekend off, to see how well my legs recover.

## **Update 25 July 2014**

The walk was a bit more painful this morning and I was a few seconds outside the 32 minutes for the first time. It was my thigh muscles that were really protesting. The legs have settled down now (10am). I have nothing too strenuous on the schedule and am looking forward to my two rest days – though we are going to a kiddies' birthday bash tomorrow lunchtime...

### ***The right knee***

I've just tried stepping up and down on the back step, which is 220mm high. I can do this no-hands on the left knee, but I don't seem to be able to get up on the right one – I need my hands pulling me forwards rather than up, as they do on the bloody spiral staircase! I can't quite work out what the problem is

As a next step, I've just tried the conservatory step, which is 125mm high, and I can manage this no-hands on the right knee with no problems. I then went back and tried the back step again, managing with just my left hand providing a little support on the adjacent windowsill. It seems that the only solution might be to exercise regularly on

the 125mm step for a while and then find something else a little higher, working my way up to the 210mm height.

This does raise the question of whether my sit-stand-sit exercise wasn't as symmetrical as I thought was I helping the right knee by taking more weight on the left leg? No - I was only lifting half my body-weight then (14 stone 4 pounds, by the way).

The spiral staircase has 200mm rises apart from the bottom one, which is only 160mm.

### **Wednesday 20 August 2014**

The ankles have been deteriorating recently and are both quite disabling – though the left one is vastly better than it was before I started the exercises - so I've cut out the exercises and been wearing the sports supports more. Finally, on the 14 August, I got a call from the Derby OTs' Splint Workshop offering me an appointment on Monday 18 August. I don't know if Claire had asked specifically for an appointment on the same day as Mr Milner's clinic, but this worked very well. I texted her and she called to say she would 'pop round to Splints' with an x-ray form and then see me in clinic to look at the results.

This all went according to plan, apart from a 50-minute wait at Splints – but they had made the appointment at very short notice. Claire dropped off the form while we were waiting. I had a fairly short consultation and came away with two appliances something rather like my sports supports, but with a Velcro front opening and a Velcro strap that does a figure-eight on top of the foam; and something very like what Andy Murray wears – a short soleplate that drops into the shoe with a plastic splint on each side and two Velcro straps to go around the ankle and lower leg. The splints can pivot backwards and forwards.

So I got two appliances for the left ankle when the serious problem was now in the right one! As I write, I have the 'soft' support on my left ankle and the 'Andy Murray Special' on the right, because things have changed pretty dramatically since the end of July.

I started this account in the middle of the saga rather than at the beginning, so I haven't mentioned what had happened before and during my delayed annual review appointment on the 9 June.

### ***How it all started***

I had seen the GP on the 25 March about a urinary problem and the painful left ankle, and had been given an x-ray form to take to Bassetlaw Hospital. (About six weeks before this, I have a record of the ankle being quite disabling when our fishmonger at Worksop Market got me a 25kg bag of salt and I was unable to get it to the car because of weakness and pain in the ankle.) The x-ray report came back identifying 'moderate osteoarthritis' and something about a 'tilt', and the GP suggested some physio might help. I got a physio appointment on the 19 April, when I saw the senior therapist. He looked at the x-ray and recommended mild mobilising exercises but didn't think they could do anything else for me. He thought I should see an orthopaedic surgeon.

I saw the GP again on the 13 May. He was happy with the physio recommendations, but as I had an existing appointment for my ankle-replacement review he suggested that, rather than him making a new referral, I should simply go along for that and ask if they would also look at the left ankle. If not, then come back and see him for a referral letter. Knowing how frenziedly busy Mr Milner's Monday afternoon clinics are, I wasn't impressed with this idea, so as soon as I got home I found the appointment card Claire had given me when she first took over Mr Milner's routine reviews.

Luckily it was still on my office noticeboard and, as I'd hoped, had her mobile number handwritten on it. I sent her a text and, to my amazement, she called back within an hour. She confirmed what I had expected – that the left ankle would need a new referral but that I could just bring the letter along on the day. I immediately phoned the surgery and the receptionist promised to get the doctor to write a letter for me to collect. This gave him a day shy of four weeks to get the letter done, but I chased it a couple of times before I was called to tell me it was ready for collection.

We duly turned up in Derby on 9/6/2014 and were given an x-ray form for both ankles. It's worth mentioning that I was lying down when my left ankle was x-rayed at Bassetlaw. However, Mr Milner has always had my ankle x-rayed standing, with most of my weight on it. On this occasion, the result was dramatic. Never mind 'moderate osteoarthritis' – the ankle was already too badly damaged for a replacement, and Mr Milner was eager enough to do the fusion that he scoured his very full diary and offered me the 22 August.

It took me almost a month to be sure that I didn't want to go ahead with this I didn't text Claire until the 4 July. The early part of this document was written to clear my head about the whole thing so I'd be able to make a coherent case to Claire for opting for the alternatives to surgery. As it turned out, she didn't need much persuading, and the ultimate outcome was my Splints appointment this Monday.

However, there was another complication. The x-ray of my right ankle – the one Mr Milner had replaced on the 9 March 2006 and repaired on the 18 May 2011 – showed some little bits of what appeared to be wire scattered around the joint. Claire explained that the polythene bearing in the ankle replacement has a wire embedded in it to allow its position to be determined on an x-ray (because polythene doesn't show up very well on x-rays). Oddly, I hadn't noticed this on all the previous pictures and it hadn't been mentioned as nothing had been wrong. Mr Milner seemed quite concerned about this, an indication that the bearing might be failing again, but still decided that the left ankle fusion could take priority.

As things turned out just ten weeks later, this would have been the wrong priority. The right ankle had been becoming progressively more painful and the left one progressively less so as a result of the exercise programme. This week's x-rays produced expressions of horror from me, Claire and – when he had been called in – Mr Milner.

The two metal components of the STAR implant are normally parallel when viewed from the front or the rear, but mine were dramatically out of line. I would estimate that the bottom piece was tilted outwards by at least 15 degrees and maybe 20. The talus bone to which it is attached and the heel bone below were severely out of place.

More worryingly, there was a sign that the bottom of the tibia had fractured – actually split – but that the fracture had partially healed. This would explain the worst pain, which has been up the inside of the ankle into the shin.

I had noticed a tendency for the ankle to roll outwards, and that my tatty everyday Reebok trainers and Hi-Tech lightweight walking boots had both worn badly on the outside back corners. Cause? Effect? Who knows. Luckily my 'best' Reeboks are pretty new and are working well with the new supports.

Mr Milner decided that this needed urgent surgery. The first slot he could find in the diary was late October – around eight weeks from now. Not good news. He said he would go away and try to make the operation happen much sooner, even if it meant opening a theatre on a Saturday. That's something he doesn't like doing for 'serious' surgery, perhaps because he can't hand-pick his theatre team.

He is still hoping that the ankle replacement can be repaired again, which depends on whether there has been any damage to the bearing surfaces. Any scratches

would wear away a new plastic hinge much too quickly. Even if it can be repaired, he anticipates having to do some work on the subtalar joint – the one between the talus and the heelbone – through a second incision at the side, so the surgery will be more complicated than the last repair.

If the repair isn't viable, he is talking about a fusion. Not just that, but probably the insertion of a metal rod up through the heelbone right into the tibia. Whether that will reduce rehab time or increase it, I have no idea.

The surprise – and, to say the least, disappointment! – is that the thicker bearing fitted in 2011 seems to have failed in just three years, two years sooner than the thinner original.

So that's where things stand as of today.

Mr Milner didn't mention anything about stabilising and protecting the ankle between now and the operation, but I've taken my own decision on that. The fortuitous gift of two supports enables me to protect both ankles – the really bad one with the 'Andy Murray Special' and the less bad with the soft one. I'm also using a crutch to take some of the weight off the right leg.

The concern now is the left leg's role once I'm back on crutches. At least it has a better knee than the right one, but the ankle is the one he wanted to fuse this Friday! Admittedly I've improved the ankle considerably with exercise, and I'll be able to move the 'Andy Murray Special' across when it's not needed by the really bad ankle, but the left one is going to take quite a pasting during rehab.

The next few weeks – or months – look pretty dismal.

I went out to the garage, where my old Asolo leather walking boots had hung on a coat-hook behind the door for years. They weren't there, or – as far as I could see – anywhere else in the garage. So I checked the garden shed without finding them there either. Then, later, Pat came in with them – they had been hanging on a nail in the shed all the time! I gave them a thorough wash inside and out – very necessary, especially as there was some evidence that a mouse might have been nesting in one of them (we'd had them in the garage last year). I then left them in the conservatory to dry and went looking for the tin of NikWax that I'd had for many years. I couldn't find that either, so I ordered some – now a tube of wax/water emulsion that can be applied to wet as well as dry leather – from Amazon. I hope this will soften the leather a little as it's very dry and stiff.

### **Thursday 21 August 2014**

This morning we went supermarket shopping. I wore my only good Reebok trainers with the soft support from the hospital on my 'good' (left) ankle and the 'Andy Murray Special' on the right ankle (the one with the collapsing implant).

I asked Pat to drive us to Morrison's as I didn't want to take the supports off for driving and then replace them when we arrived (I'd been warned not to use them while driving without informing my insurers). I was using one crutch on the left side to take some of the load off the right ankle, and swapped this for the trolley when we started shopping. The pain was quite severe, and got steadily worse in spite of my taking quite a lot of weight on the trolley. By the time we had finished I was fairly desperate and very relieved to get back in the car. I managed to carry three heavy bags of shopping – too heavy for Pat – into the house, help with putting the stuff away and make our coffee, but it was a great relief to sit down and remove the supports, particularly the right one. My first walk to the bathroom with no supports was very painful, so I put the soft support on the right ankle before going again. That – and/or more time – seemed to have helped.

Later, just before 3pm, walking barefoot but with the soft support on, things are a lot more comfortable.

I must admit that I was getting pretty anxious earlier. I'm just hoping I haven't done some new damage to the ankle...

### **Friday 22 August 2014**

Today is the day I would have been having my left ankle fusion if I hadn't changed my mind. The left ankle is still quite comfortable with regular gentle mobilising exercises, so that would probably have been a really bad idea.

Fortunately I didn't go for it, because after yesterday's miserable visit to Morrison's followed by a very careful day the right ankle was depressingly painful when I got up several times through the night for a pee. I put the soft support on before I came downstairs and switched to the AMS ('Andy Murray Special') as soon as I sat down with a cup of tea. I managed to set up breakfast, but was very glad to sit down afterwards. Nevertheless I did manage to start a batch of home-made yogurt.

At the moment, sitting still, I have a dull ache. I have also noticed a silly habit when sitting on my office chair in front of the computer, I have taken to hooking my right foot round one of the chair's casters – probably not very clever at all!

### **Monday 25 August 2014**

I've given the ankles a bit more to do over the weekend.

On Saturday I went out in the garden with my stepson Aidan to look at some jobs that need doing, which involved navigating round various obstacles, and was none the worse for the experience.

Then on Sunday morning I decided to try walking to the local shops for the papers – some routines are just too entrenched to be abandoned! I put the soft support on the right (bad) ankle and then tried on the Asolo boots with some nice thick socks. To my amazement, they were remarkably comfortable and seemed to be providing quite a lot of support, so off I went with one crutch and a shopping bag. The walk was pretty painful, not least because our local tarmac pavements are steeply sloped towards the road. Either the roadbuilders must have been expecting tropical monsoons or they were just totally incompetent.

Actually the same could be said from the pavements in Derby. I've always suspected that this was what caused my right ankle to fail originally.

Anyway, I decided not to risk bringing back two 2-litre bottles of milk and managed to get back home with *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer* and *The Worksop Guardian* – quite enough of a load, thanks mainly to Murdoch's monster.

I'd been uncomfortably aware of pressure from the right boot on the Velcro fastening of the soft support, but once I'd got the boots off and had a little rest the ankles felt surprisingly good. Obviously the boots had given them some serious lateral support – they had felt as if the ankles were in plaster! Next time I'll try my old smooth neoprene supports under my socks...

For the rest of the day things weren't too bad, and I even managed to produce Sunday evening dinner single-handed.

This morning I changed our beds, including the monstrous wrestle of getting our king-size duvet into its cover, and then had a shower and shave. The right ankle is sore, but not half as bad as it was after Morrisons.

## **Tuesday 26 August 2014**

Some nights, my nocturnal wanderings to the en-suite are fairly pain-free after a few hours' rest, but not so last night. Yet the right ankle has been surprisingly pain-free today. I've actually been walking around the house without the crutch for most of the morning and early afternoon, so I haven't a clue what's going on!

## **Wednesday 27 August 2014**

I probably pushed the ankle a bit hard yesterday, supervising a plumber who had come to sort out some taps upstairs and downstairs. I started getting a really sharp pain in my big toe, so intense that I started thinking 'Gout?! I've just had a before-lunch stroll down the garden wearing the soft support with socks and trainers, and using one crutch, and come back in considerable pain – the whole foot, but with a focus on the big toe again. Now I'm sitting barefoot at the computer and the pain has faded nicely.

I have the impression that the tightness of the soft support might actually be causing the toe problem...

## **Friday 29 August 2014**

Yesterday afternoon we went to Sainsbury's. I drove both ways with no supports on the ankles, and that was fine. When we had parked, I put the AMS on the right ankle and, using the trolley for support, got round without too much grief – perhaps not as painful as the trip to Morrisons. However, the ankle was pretty painful for the rest of the day and during the night.

This morning, rather than using the soft support, I'm wearing the old neoprene ones on both ankles and walking around in my socks...

## **Tuesday 2 September 2014**

I'm certain now that anything tight around my right foot – the instep area – triggers or exacerbates the pains in my toes. We went to Buxton on Sunday with me driving both ways. I wore my ancient soft leather Clarks shoes and after a while the right foot became really painful. I was considering asking Pat to drive when it occurred to me to undo the lace on that shoe. I re-tied it for a call at the Chatsworth Farm Shop (for Pat's favourite potted meat) and undid it again before driving the rest of the way to Buxton without much pain. I had the neoprene supports on both ankles, which was okay as I spent most of the day in my stocking feet. I took them off before leaving for home and drove with the right shoe unlaced, managing the 75-minute journey without much pain.

I had a fairly quiet day yesterday, but today has been hectic, starting with getting up at 6am after a very disturbed night – my bladder woke me at least four times, and the prospect of the operation on Friday, with its two possible (or most probable) outcomes, provided me with plenty to worry about each time I awoke. I was quite relieved to see six-o'clock come round, to dress hurriedly and to pee in a specimen vial. I was presently surprised by the clarity and pale colour of the specimen, as I had been wondering whether the effects of the enlarged prostate were being made worse by an infection.

We were off by 6.45am and had a pretty painless drive down to Derby despite the roadworks and 50mph limit on the M1. We arrived at the Royal Derby Hospital with half an hour to spare – me driving again with an unlaced trainer – and found Car Park Two half empty. It should be even better at 7.30am on Friday! That gave us time for a cappuccino (real Costa's!) and a biscuit in the little café, and then the long walk to the snappily-names Trauma and Orthopaedic Pre-Operation Assessment area where,



due to some mix-up, we waited for the best part of an hour before a session with Mr Milner and two of his team, at which he explained the options.

As expected, he is going to try to salvage the STAR ankle implant, but this time it's going to be more complicated he will need to clean up and fuse the subtalar joint between the talus and the heel-bone, doing quite a complicated realignment job. As this will require several ligaments to be adjusted, the healing time may be longer than before. If the STAR is damaged, he will have to take it out and do a full fusion, straightening the ankle and inserting a metal rod through the heel bone and talus and up inside the tibia. In order to avoid shortening the leg, he will graft a piece of someone else's hip joint from the bone bank between the heel bone and talus (I think). The bone bank stores carefully vetted pieces of bone at -80degC only from patients who have had hip replacements, most of whom are elderly and therefore low-risk for HIV and other nasties but who are nevertheless tested!

So it doesn't look as if I'll be dancing very soon after the operation with either outcome!

This was followed by an amazingly comprehensive medical examination by two nurses weight and BMI, three blood samples, blood pressure, ECG, groin and nose swabs for MRSA – the whole shooting match! Much more than I've ever had before. The whole process involved the usual hospital practice of collecting the same information from forms I had filled in and forms they filled in.

Anyway, we were out at 10:30am and did a fairly hefty food shop at Derby Sainsbury's before driving home. I managed the drive both ways and the long walks through the hospital, then the shopping, and then unloading four heavy bags at home without any obvious ill-effects. I realised that I'd been using the one crutch more for emotional support than mechanical assistance.

I began to wonder if I actually needed surgery...

### **Wednesday 3 September 2014**

I went to bed absolutely knackered last night and actually slept through until 5:15am with no interruptions from the bladder! Then, of course, I lay awake going over and over all the possible problems, but cat-napped a little and didn't get up until after 8am. The ankles felt surprisingly comfortable in bare feet and stocking feet, but a bit rocky in trainers.

We decided to treat ourselves to lunch out today, and went to The White Swan at Blyth and had a full three-course meal so we wouldn't need more than a snack this evening – very enjoyable despite my screaming toes which necessitated eating with one shoe off!

I devoted a little time to checking my phone with earphones for the music I have on there, added a whole lot more, and then made sure BBC iPlayer and iPlayerRadio are working okay. I was pleased to find that the radio app allows you to listen to live broadcasts. Not sure about TV, but no shortage of entertainment anyway. The hospital has a commercial WiFi service for which one has to pay, which will be money well spent! That and plenty of Kindle books should see me through...

I had a hiccup with the music, because having accepted loads of music the 32GB microSD card suddenly stopped working. Nothing I could do would restore it.

### **Thursday 4 September 2014**

This morning I woke, after a very disturbed night with a pee about every hour, feeling a slightly unhealthy need for the loo. I didn't have diarrhoea but everything was a bit loose. I hope it wasn't anything I ate at The Swan. I still feel a bit bloated, so I'll treat

the system gently for the rest of the day and hope it clears up. The last thing I'll need tomorrow is malfunctioning bowels.

I found a puny 256MB microSD card in the box with the disastrous Chinkyfone and fitted that. Not only did it work OK but for some reason it accepted about twice as much data as it should have done! So I filled it and put some more tracks in the phone's internal memory. I've got masses of music and the whole of the original radio version of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which should keep me well entertained.

Oh yes – the ankles! I've been up for two hours, walking fairly normally around the house on bare feet, with no more than a few twinges. I washed my Merrell water-sandals yesterday to wear as slippers in hospital. It will be interesting to see if they aggravate the burning toes as much as trainers and formal shoes.

**Later** Much more pain later today. And, surprisingly, just as much wearing the sandals as with the trainers. All packed and ready to go now – I will drive in the trainers and use the sandals as slippers. I haven't owned slippers for decades, and in place of a dressing gown I will be using joggers and, if cold, a sweatshirt. I hope the ward sister isn't cross!

Actually it would be 'slipper' anyway, as I'll only have one functioning foot after the op!

More here when I escape from the hospital...

### **Wednesday 10 September 2014**

Six days since the last report. On Friday morning (5 September) we left at 5:30am for Derby, arriving with loads of time to spare but unable to take advantage in the café. As directed, I had had a decent meal at 630pm on Thursday, and I topped up with a big glass of milk before bed. In the morning, until 630am, I was allowed tea with a little milk but nothing else after that, so I had two big mugs while Pat ate her breakfast.

We got to the admitting ward early and were checked in, but for some reason she wasn't allowed to come with me to my bay. It would be okay for me to leave my luggage and meet her back in the dayroom, but I decided it would be much more sensible for her to leave straight away. I parked myself on the bed and did my best to pass the time. I was number four of the four on Mr Milner's list, but I was called sooner than expected – around 2pm – having been allowed a drink a bit earlier.

I had had a visit from the anaesthetist – a very jovial black South African – and changed into the usual horrible hospital disposable pants and gown. Then I was rolled down to theatre, where I waited until a very tall and beautiful black South African assistant anaesthetist came and wheeled me in to the anaesthetic room.

After a friendly chat about my working for De Beers in the late 1960s and then about Paul Simon's *Graceland* – Wife Number Two and I having been to the concert in Birmingham – the big man started work. Unfortunately, like the little Chinese lady at Bassetlaw some years ago, he couldn't get a needle into my spine, so I had to have a general anaesthetic.

The next thing I remember is being on the ward at something like 930pm. I knew I must have been revived in Recovery, but had no recollection of that at all. So I had been cheated of the fun and games in theatre and the pleasure of being coddled by one of Derby's lovely recovery nurses too!

I wasn't able to get much information because apparently Mr Milner had dictated his notes but they hadn't been printed. I can't remember how, but over the next 24 hours I deduced that he had managed to reinstate the ankle replacement (fantastic!) but

had had to break and re-set the heel bone, presumably with his usual tweaking of tendons and ligaments. I was in a plaster cast called a back-slab, solid at the back but open at the front, securely fixed with sticky bandages. There was no pain at all, and my exposed toes were numb. I later found out that the promised pain relief had been used – a long and very fine catheter inserted in my thigh and navigated very precisely to a nerve in the popliteal hollow behind the knee. This was fed a trickle of local anaesthetic from a strange sort of balloon in a bottle, contained in a neat little nylon bag with a shoulder strap! The exposed toes were numb, and there was no trace of pain.

I presume I was fed and watered and vaguely recall a disturbed night with a lot of rather difficult wees in papier-mâché bottles, a breakfast of Weetabix without sugar (because I hadn't asked for it!), a wash in bed and then a long and boring day. My lovely Samsung phone really came into its own, with the earphones feeding me episodes of the original BBC radio production of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and loads of my favourite old pop and rock tracks.

I had chats with a few transient occupants of the other beds, the most rewarding being with a really nice chap even older than I was – about 76, I think, He and I shared an irritation with what is being done to our precious language, even by paid employees of the once-professional BBC, which made for some amusing discussion. I later discovered that, like me, he had taught in Derbyshire, ending as a long-term secondary deputy head in South Normanton! This of course led to a pleasant exchange of recollections.

At some point on Saturday a physio came and assessed me on a zimmer frame. Given that my 'good' ankle is pretty bad, even when thoroughly confined with a neoprene sleeve and the Andy Murray Special, it was hardly surprising that I didn't do very well. He went off, saying we could try crutches on the following day.

On Saturday night I was still completely pain-free but my toes and parts of the back of my leg were completely numb.. I decided to try cutting off the supply by sliding the little bit of plastic with its tapered slot over the tube to close it completely. By morning the numbness had gone – and there wasn't a trace of pain.

On Sunday morning I was told that if sessions with the physio and an occupational therapist went okay I would be able to go home. This possibility blew all common sense away I would blag my way through the sessions and get home regardless. I duly achieved very little with the crutches but was nevertheless cleared by the physio – a bit worrying, I thought! I said that the OT wasn't needed to confirm that conditions at home were safe because I'd gone home in plaster and on crutches three times previously. The nurse said I could go but would need to sign some sort of indemnity, and I called Pat, who insisted on coming without delay. I packed my bags and waited impatiently. She and the OT arrived at almost the same time, so I did get the check before leaving.

'You can check out any time – but you can never leave', sang the Eagles in *Hotel California*. That could have been written for people being discharged from hospital. The staff told her to head for Maternity, where she would find 30-minute drop-off/pick-up parking slots and loads of wheelchairs. Neither turned out to be true, and having hiked about two miles across this vast hospital she actually found and 'appropriated' a chair, She then had to wheel me all the way back to Maternity, where we found the car unmolested.

Getting into the car wasn't easy, but my motivation was high. I managed to swing myself into the front passenger seat, and off we went – home!

Getting to within six feet of the front door was a doddle. Getting inside was something else. I managed to shuffle to the doorstep with the zimmer and lift it on to the step. But there was no way my 'good' ankle could hop up the five-or-so inches. I eventually

turned round and managed – somehow, by a combination of controlled lowering and just falling – to end up sitting on the step with my back to the door. The rest was fairly easy using my hands and my ‘good’ foot, I was able to row myself backwards. Once my nylon swimming shorts hit the carpet, they slid beautifully and I managed to get into the bathroom and, using the bath, the loo and the basin, get myself sitting on the loo-seat lid.

Apart from the enormous delight of being home, I don’t have much recollection of the rest of the day. I must have managed to get to my recliner in the sitting-room, back to the kitchen to eat and finally to the bathroom and front bedroom (both downstairs).

The big problem was the bedroom the door only opens ninety degrees before hitting a built-in wardrobe, leaving narrow gaps between it, a free-standing wardrobe and the foot of the bed. The zimmer wouldn’t go through this, so I had to leave it outside the door, switch to crutches and shuffle to the bed, grab the foot-board and get myself round the corner and onto the mattress. I managed this somehow and got into bed, reading an listening to music before trying to sleep.

This was difficult, because I needed to pee very frequently and found it very difficult to do so. My lower abdomen was becoming very hard and painful, yet I simply couldn’t get a free flow into the plastic urinal bottle with snap-on lid which I’d bought before going into hospital. This was a godsend, but by halfway through the night it was almost full with a litre of pee. It was clear that it wouldn’t last the night. I actually considered opening the window and emptying it onto the drive, but our front bow windows have enormous sills. I was also pretty sure the windows would be locked and I didn’t fancy shuffling around looking for the key. So, insanely, I embarked on the return journey: bed to crutches, crutches to zimmer, zimmer to the bathroom – somehow clutching a kilogram of piddle in a bottle – which, thankfully, has a moulded handle like that on a plastic milk bottle. I got there, unloaded and rinsed the bottle and got back to bed. How I did this without falling, I have no idea. Needs must...

On Monday morning it was obvious that I would have to sleep in the office, which has only a single bed but is much more accessible. I had slept there before, after my knee surgeries. It also became obvious that the bandages around my back-slab were unravelling and might soon drop off.

I have forgotten to mention that, at some point on Saturday (I think), one of the male nurses had arrived and announced that he needed to re-bandage my ankle. The plaster and the bandages had soaked and leaked quite a lot of blood, so I was happy with this. The foot was wrapped in the lint material used inside casts and then with sticky open-weave bandages. I was concerned that the nurse looked a bit perplexed several times as he attacked the bandages with what looked like rather blunt scissors, and even more when he used non-adhesive bandages and just tucked the ends in without pins or tape.

After a restless night at home his handiwork was rapidly falling apart, so I phoned the GP and asked for a district nurse to come and re-dress the ankle. Not one but two nurses eventually arrived in the late afternoon, having mixed me up with a different patient and been off on a wild-goose chase. They took one look at the situation and stopped. They couldn’t do this it wasn’t a simple dressing but effectively a stage-one fracture job – the stuff they do to keep access open until any stitches are out before putting on an all-round cast. They were quite right, of course, but that left me in a serious fix. We explored possibilities and eventually they phoned wonder-woman Claire at the Royal Derby Hospital. She asked me to take some pictures of the dressing and send them to her so she could show them to Mr Milner. Having seen them she said the only solution would be for us to come back down the following morning, aiming for 11am, to Mr Milner’s fracture clinic. We were to park outside and reception would find a porter with a chair to bring me in while she went to find a legitimate parking space. Meanwhile, could Pat tuck the bandages in as best she

could and perhaps wrap some more around them. Pat did this, with proper crêpe bandages and plenty of sticky tape, leaving the thing looking a bloody sight tidier than after the ward nurse had finished with it.

At some point around then I had the brainwave of using my wheeled office chair as a means of transport. This has no arms, so it is relatively easy to get on and off, but the wheels are small. They run really well on the kitchen floor tiles, but are very hard work on soft carpets. However, using this – pushing myself along with my good foot or pulling on any available door-frames, tables, worktops or whatever – felt a lot safer than trying to hop with the zimmer or, even worse, the crutches.

Having only returned from Derby the previous day, we weren't keen on going back, but there seemed to be no alternative. As things turned out it was a very beneficial visit.

I haven't noted how I got out of the front door, but I have a dim recollection of doing it with the zimmer. I'll have to improvise all over again this coming Tuesday.

We made an early start and got to the hospital with time to spare. Pat had to park at the entrance to Orthopaedic Outpatients, in an area designated for ambulances. She managed to find a chair but no porter, but a passing ambulance man volunteered to wheel me in himself while Pat did a full lap of this huge hospital site and eventually found a space very close to where we'd gone in.

I had managed to 'hold my water' for the whole journey, and did so again for the half-hour wait before I was called in. I was taken straight to the plaster room where the kind nurses drew the curtains round my bed and left me to pee in privacy. They then dismantled my dressing, needing me to explain how the bandages had got so unravelling. At this point Mr Milner turned up with his entourage (but sadly no Claire), examined my exposed foot and issued his instructions, saying no harm seemed to have been done.

Despite obviously being insanely busy – he had over 30 patients that morning according to the waiting-room whiteboard – he did go over the operation with me. He had, as I knew, reinstated the ankle replacement. However, he had cut – rather than broken – the heelbone, and had put a screw in. Sadly that didn't reduce the rehab time still another six weeks after my next appointment, with no weight-bearing.

I was fitted with a closed resin cast almost up to the knee, but because it was replacing the back-slab the nurse cut it open down the front and fitted it with Velcro straps. This would allow it to remain with me for the whole six weeks, and I would at least be able to let in a little fresh air – though not, I was warned, to take it off.

However, when I mentioned the urinary problem he became very concerned. He felt and tapped the abdomen and ordered an immediate bladder scan. This was an ultrasonic scan like those used with pregnant women, but the machine was able to calculate the amount of urine in the bladder. My measurement came out as a scary two litres. He explained that this was a common side effect of anaesthesia and announced that I needed a catheter urgently to drain the bladder and avoid it being permanently damaged. Not just the man who saved my ankle, but now possibly the man who saved me from a life on incontinence! Things were starting to get really complicated...

His senior registrar was charged with the task of catheterising me. As this was a young Asian woman I felt a little uneasy, but she didn't seem to be at all uncomfortable. Not, at least, until the catheter reached my bladder and a gush of pee flooded the bed, which was luckily plastic-covered.

The process was quite painful – very stingy – and I was assured that this was the lubricating jelly and would wear off. As I write, 24 hours later, the stinging has improved but I still get twinges when I move around.

My bladder was now able to drain, and – using my own bottle which has graduations moulded into it – we measured well over two litres.

I was given a new appointment letter for the following Tuesday. This would be my routine surgical follow-up with some additional checks. My ankle and its new cast, which can be opened and removed, would be checked, but the bladder would be added, so I may or may not emerge without a catheter. If I do I'll have to learn to pee all over again.

The next job was to take a blood sample, wait for the result and watch out for blood in the urine. We waited in the Orthopaedic Assessment Unit upstairs for about an hour, and were then dismissed. This time a porter had been ordered for us, and he took us right to the car. At home, I tried the zimmer again but had to resort to the more-or-less controlled fall to get into bum-shuffling position. This time I managed to use our hall chest-of-drawers to get to my feet – sorry, foot!

I started looking on the Web for a wheelchair loan service, as the office chair was both exhausting and dangerous. I bookmarked a few possibilities before shutting down the computer and myself for the night.

Having had virtually no sleep the previous night, courtesy of my bladder, I was thrilled with my second night in the office. I slept straight through to about 345am, emptied my catheter's high-capacity night bag and slept again until about 630am. Another emptying and another hour's sleep. Wow!

This morning I ordered a lightweight wheelchair for delivery tomorrow morning from an outfit called WheelFreedom. We're a bit anxious about narrow doorways in our eccentric little house, but I'm looking forward enormously to safe, easy transport. I'm even imagining possible methods of getting in and out of the front door...

I also received a letter giving me my scheduled follow-up appointment for next Monday, the day before the one I was given at the hospital. A phone-call soon solved that, but you have to wonder what sort of information system this huge and generally impressive hospital uses for such mundane, routine business...

#### **Thursday 11 September 2014**

The wheelchair arrived at 930am. The website said 'lightweight', but it seems pretty heavy! I don't know whether Pat will be able to manhandle it into the car.

It also seemed pretty wide and I needed to measure it to confirm the width at 25 inches. It still wouldn't go through the sittingroom door, thanks to a doorstep to stop the door bashing into the radiator. Pat and our friend John took the door off, and I can now move fairly freely between the sittingroom, my office bedroom, the bathroom and the kitchen, provided I leave the footrests off. At the nth attempt I have just managed to get the chair almost straight in front of the office desk, but I'm really both too low and too far away to type very well. I think the typist's chair will have to come back.

It's L-plates as a wheelchair user at the moment, but getting around is much easier – and safer – than on the office chair.

I really think I'm going to have to start work on zimmer and crutch technique...

The office chair went back in the office after I wrote the previous paragraphs and I'm currently sitting on it. Typing feels much more natural. The wheelchair is parked near the door.

My bladder has been very irritable this morning – a sharp sting when I put any pressure on it by bending forward. I've just emptied my catheter bag for the third time already – nearly 800ml in the bottle already, after almost filling it completely with the contents of the night bag.

Admittedly I have just consumed two large mugs of quite strong coffee, but that doesn't explain the quantity collected overnight. I haven't had any alcohol since the operation – six days now, a new personal best! – but have had a fair amount of cranberry drink as well as water through the night. I think I should keep drinking lots, but preferably most of it should be water.

I managed a reasonable bowel movement this morning, but pretty hard stools after yesterday's highly fermented mass. I had half a can of Branston Baked Beans on wholemeal toast for lunch, with a glass of water before my cup of tea. My taste-buds are still adjusting to drinking hot, freshly brewed Ringtons Connoisseur tea instead of the tepid, stewed hospital version.

It's just after 5pm now and the bladder seems to have calmed down – provided I don't bend too far. The bag is filling steadily and being emptied at regular intervals. After dumping the 800ml mentioned above I think I have emptied it three times. There is 600ml in the bottle now and the bag is full enough to be emptied again. I'm wearing shorts now, which makes this a hell of a lot easier. I'm also wearing the bag much higher – mid-thigh – because Pat doesn't want it to be visible if we have visitors. She is right, of course, but frankly I'm past caring!

My daughter Sarah is coming up from Peterborough tomorrow, and I'm sure she won't mind, having worked as a Health Care Assistant for quite a long time.

### **Friday 12 September 2014**

A bad night last night. I slept from before midnight to around 4am but couldn't get back to sleep, so I took advantage of the Kindle's illuminated screen to read for a while. I tried one of my own equivalents of 'counting sheep' and that didn't work, but at some time I must have drifted off because the next I remember was looking at my watch in the dark, without my glasses, and trying to see if it was 6:30am or 7:30am. The first, I guess, because I remember suddenly seeing daylight later, when it was 7:30am.

MY normally hyperactive worry mechanism, which tends to cut in and keep me awake once I've woken in the small hours, has been pretty quiet lately, but this morning it was in full flight. I was desperate for a shower, having only sponged bits of myself since my last shower the day before the operation. Would I be able to manage? I could remember my success in a full-length cast after my knee operations, but that was seven years ago in 2008, and the precise details of how I'd managed the shower were a bit hazy.

I had bought a full-length plastic cover with a brilliant neoprene cuff like the ones on wetsuits, and I knew I had worked out how to get myself onto the edge of our big corner bath and shuffle round to the seat in the actual corner, but the details were hazy – to say the least. It had to be sorted, though, with six-and-a-half weeks in a cast ahead of me.

When I'd worried myself sick about that, I turned to the problem of getting the wheelchair into the car for my hospital appointment next Tuesday. Would Pat be able to get the chair into the car. Would it be better to put it in through the tailgate or lower the back seats and put it in through the back door? Are the wheels really easily detachable as promised in the user guide, and if so would they go back on ok?

Oh – the joys of late-night insomnia.

In the morning light, with a cup of tea inside me, I was feeling a little more optimistic. After breakfast I asked Pat to put the zimmer frame in the bathroom just in case and wheeled myself in. I'd already been mounting the loo successfully for four days, even if not always managing to take full advantage, so that bit went ok. Considering I'd had half a can of beans for lunch and a very large portion of frozen peas with dinner, and

had felt quite gripey early in the morning, my 'motion' wasn't exactly free, but I think my bowels have finally caught up.

So – the shower...

I went through the complex routine of setting my left ankle free undo the three Velcro straps on the Andy Murray Special; undo the lace in my trainer so it's very loose; pull off the trainer and the AMS; peel off the sock and then the neoprene ankle support. Then, holding the washbasin with my left hand, I managed to raise myself enough on my 'good' leg to lower the lid and get my shorts and boxers off. The rest of my clothes followed more easily.

Getting the plastic cover on over the cast was really difficult. I don't know if the neoprene cuff had shrunk, but it took me quite a while to get my foot in. The rest was easy. I pulled the cuff quite high on my thigh, deciding I'd flannel the upper leg rather than shower it. As a precaution, I left the catheter bag in place.

The side of the bath is quite near my knees when I'm on the loo. I'm not 100% sure exactly how I did it, but using two hands and the 'good' leg I managed to swing round until I was sitting on the the bath rim. Using two hands and one leg I shuffled round to the head end of the bath, where it joins the wall. I then swung first the 'good' leg and then the plastic-covered on over the side into the bath, which proved surprisingly easy.

The rim that runs along the wall to the corner is no more than a couple of centimetres wide, so I was a bit uneasy about shuffling along it. However, with two hands and two bum-cheeks I managed to get the corner seat very easily.

There was one slight hitch I had taken my glasses off before leaving the loo, and I couldn't see the 'H' and 'C' on the taps. I resorted to experiment and eventually got the shower handset delivering a decent jet of water at an acceptable temperature.

At this point I unplugged the catheter bag and dropped it in the bottom of the bath for a good wash.

Then the sheer bliss of a double shot of Vosene, with its wonderfully hygienic smell of coal tar phenolics. The accumulate grease in my hair defeated the first shot, but the second tamed it and I immediately felt ten times better. Then my big fluffy body scourer and lots of Sanex shower cream. I managed my normal routine, apart from having to liberate my bum and related bits one at a time and only washing one leg and foot, then just luxuriated in the stream of hot water. I really could have stayed there all day – the feeling was just wonderful. But no – I needed to get on (though with what, in my present condition, I was far from sure.

A little more cautiously, because the bum-cheeks, hands and bath rim were now wet and possibly a little soapy, I shuffled back to the end of the narrow bit of rim and unhooked the towel from the inside of the door. I swung first the bad leg and then the 'good' one over the side of the bath and worked my way back to the loo and onto the lid.

Done it! I was really thrilled that this challenge had gone so well and so easily. The prospect of six-and-a-half weeks of seated showers was daunting no longer, but something to anticipate eagerly – every morning if I was feeling greedy.

Towelled off, anti-perspirantised, with pile ointment on my bum and Savlon cream on the angry red patches I'd spotted at the tops of my inner thighs, I put on clean everythings, pulled the wheelchair into place, levered myself aboard and set out for the kitchen, dirty laundry on my lap.

Confidence now much restored – it needed to be after the misery of the early-morning worry session – I had a proper look at the wheelchair. Lifting one side at a time it didn't seem very heavy, but I wasn't sure Pat would manage it. The wheels are



released by simply pressing the soft plastic button in the centre of each hub, and they click back on easily. The chair has tilt-limiting bars with tiny wheels on the back, presumably to allow a carer to tilt the chair back enough to get the front casters onto a kerb, so taking the main wheels off would only drop the side of the chair two or three inches. I tested folding and opening, and this was smooth and easy. So it remains now, between today and Tuesday, to figure out getting the chair in and out of the car. I can't for the life of me see how I can help – unless we put the chair in the back door and I kneel on my seat and reach over to lift it in...

Next, I decided it was time to test my prowess with the zimmer, which had so far been very poor. I retrieved the frame from the bathroom – it's feather-light and has wheels on two legs – and towed it into the sitting-room. Then, lifting myself on two arms and one leg I rose from the wheelchair and took hold of the zimmer's grips.

This was depressing. Leaning as hard as I could on my hands, I tried to bend my knee and lift my foot off the carpet – and failed. Something, somewhere in my nervous system, simply refused to allow this. However, I could take a little hop, so I satisfied myself with a set of twenty such. I'll do this several times a day and see if I can build my strength up.

If I can't do this, I can't imagine I'll have much success with the elbow-crutches, which I used to be able to manage fairly well. Whatever happened to the old-fashioned Long John Silver jobs that fit under your armpits, requiring no strength at all to support your weight? Bloody modern technology...

We had a lovely afternoon with Sarah, after a delicious lunch of carrot and coriander soup and mushroom stroganoff with rice, topped with a delicious lime mascarpone cheesecake. Nothing much to report really.

### **Sunday 14 September 2014**

Yesterday we had a welcome visit from my stepson Alistair, his wife Julie and their two wonderful boys, Ewan (7) and Tom (3). As well as lifting the general gloom for a couple of hours, Alistair quickly knocked up a couple of MDF ramps for the front door, but sadly they were too steep for Alistair on handles and I on wheels just managed to get my 14 stones out of the door and back in, but it was very hard work and there was no way Pat would manage. The ramps would need to be a couple of metres long. So it looks as if I'm stuck with improvising.

The alternative is to do what we did last Tuesday, except with the aid of the wheelchair roll up to the front door, where the zimmer will have been placed; put the brakes on, lever myself upright on the chair's arm-rests; transfer my hands to the zimmer; move the zimmer out onto the doorstep; somehow hop over the ridiculous weather guard at the bottom of the door – it's at least 5cm high – move the zimmer down onto the drive and hop down. If this fails, I'll have to lower myself into a sitting position – I'm not sure how until I try – and row out, then using either the chair or the zimmer to stand up. Or row right to the car and lift myself on the door sill. Or roll over onto my knees and get the 'good' foot on the ground, which I think is how I stood up using the hall furniture when we got back on Tuesday. After all that, getting into the wheelchair from the car should be a piece of cake...

I've just folded the chair and Pat has tried lifting it. She assured me that she would be able to get it in and out of the car boot. I can see no way I'll be able to help, unless we put the seats down and she lifts one end of the chair in through the passenger-side rear door; I, kneeling on my seat, ought to be able to reach over the back and take most of the weight. The height to the folded seat-back is probably slightly less than that of the tailgate sill, so that might be best. Knowing her doggedness, though, I can see her struggling at the tailgate and doing her back again, which would leave both of us in deep trouble.

And if all else fails, it will be back to Plan A – leave the wheelchair at home and find on at the hospital as we did last Tuesday. At least we know that worked. But I'm really eager to get us mobile as a couple, and that will need the wheelchair.

Not having gone through this tortuous thought-process, I spent a lot of time in the small hours of this morning just 'wittling' (as we say in the East Midlands) about the problem. Not being fully awake, of course, I got nowhere – just wound myself up into a state of high anxiety.

A note on the catheter it's less painful now, unless I bend too far forward. In fact, after my second full shower this morning and sitting at the computer, it doesn't sting at all. I did a bit of googling the other day and found what the hospital had omitted to give me – the care instructions, which require the penis and the catheter to be washed regularly with 'mild soap', only working downwards, away from the entrance, then rinsing thoroughly and drying. I'd done this previously with Pears; lively transparent soap, but this morning I decided to use some of my Vosene shampoo, which is at least mildly antiseptic. I'm now enjoying the benefit.

Otherwise, just a lazy Sunday morning with the paper. Really, I should be rehearsing the front door thing, but I'm finding everything physical really hard work and feel like crossing that bridge, somehow, when I get to it.

I should start a regular exercise programme, though. I did my leg lifts, flexes and extends in the sleepless small hours – 16 repeats – plus some flexes, extends and rotates left and right with the left ('good') ankle. And this morning I did a couple of short laps round the sitting-room using the zimmer – I brought the chair to the frame, put the brakes on, lifted myself on the chair's arms and my 'good' leg and transferred to the frame's grips. Very hard work – a 'walk' of about three metres left me panting. I can't believe how unfit I've become. After-effects of the anaesthetic and/or the op? I don't know, but it needs sorting.

I just hope that my bladder will be restored to normal functioning when the catheter comes out on Tuesday, and that I don't need another. While it's quite nice to leave it and the catheter to do the peeing duty, and I'll probably lose a lot more sleep when I'm back 'on the bottle', I'd much rather get back to what passes for normal at my age.

Speaking of the bottle, I had my first glass of wine last night since 48 hours before the operation. I probably haven't gone without alcohol for that long for thirty years! I'll try not to let the intake build back up to half a bottle a night.

## **Tuesday 16 September 2014**

The Big Day today.

I had a shower just before bed last night, and after a rather restless night I got up at 730am. I heard Pat on the move as well. I had problems choosing a pair of trousers, as they have to go on over the left trainer, which contains – in addition to my foot – a neoprene support, a sports sock and the Any Murray Special.

Or not. After some fiddling I discovered that, once the AMS is fully fitted, it is possible to pop the shoe off, put the trousers on and replace the shoe. This allowed me to put on some comfortable lightweight combats I bought in the sale at Yeomans last winter,

After breakfast came the big question how could I get out of the house and into the car. I opened the front door, put the zimmer halfway out and stopped the wheelchair right behind it. I levered myself up on the wheelchair arms and the 'good' leg and transferred my hands to the zimmer. As I haven't managed to get my foot off the ground in this position this was where the problems began. However, I leaned forward over the zimmer, taking more-or-less all my weight on my arms, and to my amazement the foot hopped cleanly over the 5cm-high frame. The rest was easy

shuffle my foot into position, lower the zimmer onto the drive and again lean all my weight on it. With nothing to hop over, it was easy to get my foot off the 10cm-high step and onto the block paving. Half a dozen hops took me to the open passenger door of the Focus and a quick pirouette got me facing forwards. I lifted the bad foot into the footwell and swung my bum onto the seat. Sorted! (the reverse process will be described a little later.

Pat, bless her, had managed to get the fully-folded wheelchair over the sill of the boot, which she swears is lower than the folded seat-backs via the rear doors, so off we went en route for Derby. The M1, plagued with road-widening works from way north of our starting point at Junction 30 to way south of Junction 28, where we escape onto the A38. However, apart from one short gum-up we sustained a steady 50mph all the way. Then the A38 was wonderfully clear and with a 70mph limit, so Pat hammered her way down to the remodelled Abbey Hill roundabout. Abbey Hill was working well until we got to somewhere between the Duffield Road (A6) underpass and the Kedleston Road (University) junction. Then there was, as we expected, a horrendous jam tailing back from the works on the Ashbourne Road roundabout. Nevertheless we got to the hospital, parked easily (honest!), sorted the wheelchair and were in the almost-empty waiting room about a quarter of an hour ahead of my 10:25am appointment.

I went into the toilet to empty my catheter bag – for the last time, I hoped! I'd hardly got back to where we'd been sitting before one of the lovely plaster-room nurses who had worked on my the previous week came out, smiled straight at me and called my name. We actually got into the plaster room five minutes before my appointment.

The nurse then walked to the door, looked down the corridor and called 'Mr Milner' in what sounded like a rather cheeky, playful voice. My favourite surgeon arrived seconds later, wearing a big grin, and walked over. He asked the nurse to take off the detachable plastic cast, revealing a wonderful pattern of bruises that had spread right up into some of the toes – quite normal, he assured me. All the wounds had healed well, and the ankle was nicely aligned. He even got me to do a gentle flex-and-extend, was was happy with the joint's performance.

Then the really good news. I had been wondering whether the predicted six-week rehab period would be from the date of the operation or that of the first review – today's visit. Thanks to the problems with the bandages that had taken me back to the hospital last Tuesday, this was actually 11 days, rather than 14, after the op. So I had been playing with times and dates would I be coming back six weeks from now – or maybe five? Imagine my delight when he said he would see me in four weeks, and not even four from today but from yesterday Monday 13 October! And that he expected to take the cast off and start me weight-bearing. Oh joy!

There was then a brief discussion of the prospects for my 'good' left ankle. I had more-or-less dismissed the idea of a fusion on the grounds that 12 weeks in a cast with no weight-bearing would drive me completely crazy (based on my experience with the left knee surgery). Mr Milner told me that, while the cast would be on for 12 weeks, I would be able to start weight-bearing after six. That changes the whole complexion, because the really bad part of these experiences is having to cope using only one leg. A stiff and clumsy left ankle would be irritating, but nowhere near as much as an unusable one!

Next, he confirmed that the catheter could come out today. I had asked the nurse about this, and she had said that plaster-room staff didn't do catheters; I would probably have to go up to the ward. She had actually been involved in the insertion of the catheter and the ensuing deluge, but when Mr Milner asked her to do the job she agreed. He went off, still smiling happily, and in a couple of minutes, with just a mild burning sensation, the hated appliance was out.

I had been expecting a long wait to check that I could pee properly, but he told me to go home, drink plenty and keep trying to pee. He was quite sure I wouldn't want to traipse back to Derby if there were problems, and simply told me that if things didn't return to normal I should go to A&E at 'Bassetlaw, is it? I'm sure they must have a urologist there.' Quite what sort of primitive backwater he thinks we inhabit, I don't know. What I do know is that we were on our way just 20 minutes after the appointment time.

To celebrate, we took advantage of the excellent facilities at the main entrance, stopping first at Costa for a cappuccino and a pain au raisin each. Then to the little M&S food shop for some ready meals for tonight.

Getting back in the car was a breeze, as was the journey apart from a short delay at the Markeaton roundabout.

Getting back in the house also proved easier than expected. I didn't even ask Pat to put me close to the door – just to put the wheelchair inside the door facing outwards – and zimmer-hopped from the car quite easily. It's marvellous what some positive results do for confidence and enthusiasm! I put the zimmer on the doorstep, leaned hard on it and managed to hop the 10cm or so onto the step. A few shuffles turned me 180 degrees and I was able to hop triumphantly onto the chair. A fist-pump seemed appropriate.

We had a cup of tea and decided to call the *pains au raisin* lunch. We were tired rather than hungry, and just deeply relieved to be home safe and with good outcomes all-round.

It is now 3.15pm. A while ago I lay on the bed and tried to pee into my bottle. For a long time nothing happened, but then I managed to produce what felt to me like three separate reasonable pees. Oh, treacherous nervous system. The whole lot amounted to about 70ml – two tablespoons. That's reminiscent of how things were before the catheter went in, so my bubble has burst a bit. However, I did at least initiate and terminate the flow three times. We'll have to see how things go after the 4pm cuppa and biscuit...

I tried again at 3.30pm. I really felt as if I needed a pee but after five minutes of trying I had only added about another 20ml to my miserable total. Mr Milner said that the problem was a combination of the after-effects of the anaesthetic and my enlarged prostate. But I haven't missed any of the pills, so why?

By 5.50pm I had had two more attempts. The first was a struggle but raised the level in the bottle to 300ml. The second, less than 30 minutes later, had it up to 500ml. There was still a feeling of 'wanting to wee', but weaker than before, so I began to feel a little less gloomy. Before the first of the two tries, I had had a phone call from Sue and John, our very good friends who have been through much worse times because John has prostate cancer, and I had been well on the way to convincing myself that I should get down to A&E either this evening or tomorrow morning. Now, half a litre lighter, I am beginning to feel a little more optimistic maybe my system, which has been totally dependent on the catheter for a week, was coming back under my voluntary control.

At 6.25pm another urgent call produced only 50ml, taking the total to 550ml, and the after-dinner attempt of 120ml got the total to 620ml. At 9.05pm another 180ml took it to 800ml, at which triumphant point I emptied the bottle to make room for the night's output.

So from being almost sure I was going to end up at A&E, within about three hours I was fairly confident that I was recovering control. Having said that, I have tried to make sense of what happened after the operation, and it seems that I did quite a deal of peeing before the supply dried up.

## **Wednesday 16 September 2014**

Once in bed, I couldn't pee at all for a long time and started having visions of A&E in the morning, but eventually I got a flow. The bladder was quite painful, and I have no idea how many times I tried to pee and did pee. By 550am I had almost emptied my litre jug of water (as well as drinking a 200ml glass of milk). The bottle now contained 850ml of urine, but this seemed to have been accumulated from dozens of very short wees. So I emptied the bottle and drank a tooth-mug of water straight down in the bathroom. I felt more comfortable and a little later managed to produce 100ml in one pee. By 915am the bottle was back up to 550ml, so my fluids consumed and excreted balanced up pretty well. Weeing was uncomfortable but better than I had been through the night.

Amazingly, I went for two hours from 915am without another pee. At 11:15am I produced 150ml in a single pee, and the process was becoming more comfortable. This was followed by 200ml at 12:30pm, 200 at 120pm, 200 at 215pm, 250 in a single pee 305pm, 200 again at 405pm, 200 at 5pm and 160 at 535pm.

I haven't had the trouble starting a pee or sustaining it that I did yesterday. The process now feels pretty normal apart from what is now only mild discomfort. I feel pretty safe in saying that I will soon be feeling 100% normal.

I didn't record when I emptied the bottle after 550am, but I must have done so because, between 550am and now (550pm), I produced 1910ml – just shy of two litres.

## **Thursday 18 September 2014**

It must be something to do with evenings, or going to bed. Last night, at 610pm, 20 minutes after writing the last paragraph and 55 minutes after the dismal 100ml pee, I produced a dismal 100ml. An hour and 35 minutes later it was 60ml. Then came three 180ml efforts, the last at 10:20pm. So far, so good.

Then I had a very bad night. When I was ready to get my head down the bladder started playing up. I tried to pee but got more-or-less nothing but an intense burning sensation. From then on the night was uncomfortable and disturbed, but I must have got a reasonable amount of sleep. I had also managed to collect 800ml of pee, but presumably in lots of little piddles.

This morning, at 930am, I emptied the bottle. An hour later I produced a mere 90ml, 65 minutes later 130ml and a mere half-hour after that 200ml. The bladder feels fairly comfortable now – just a bit tender.

If you're reading this and are getting fed up of reading about my bladder, feel free to skip. I need a detailed record for myself, though.

There isn't much other news. Yesterday was a lazy day, recovering after the excitement of getting to Derby and back on Tuesday, which had been pretty exhausting for both of us. Except that, around 4pm I went into the kitchen to conjure up a small moussaka using the leftovers of Sunday's slow-roasted lamb shoulder. It was really awkward doing food-prep from a wheelchair, but I managed to produce fried sliced potato (okay phoney moussaka), a sauce from half a jar of Dolmio bolognese base and containing the finely chopped lamb with some basil, oregano, cumin and coriander, and a decent white sauce with a grated cheese topping.

This morning, Pat has gone to see her bother Anton – alone, since both his front and back doors have big steps. She should be back fairly soon. While she has been out, I have managed to make two cups of my favourite coffee, heat them in the microwave, empty them into a jug and empty that into a pre-heated vacuum flask. This afternoon I intend having the third full shower since I came home from hospital. I need to get into a good rhythm with this, probably once every two days.

The depressing thought is that I now know the bladder can really convince me that it's on the mend and then dump me back at the start again. I wish I knew what the hell is going on, because that is going to make every bedtime a time of anxiety.

### **Friday 19 September 2014**

The bladder really is erratic – very painful some of the time but – as now – sometimes quite painless.

I wonder whether peeing while lying down is ideal. You would think, quite naturally, that standing up would allow all the urine in the bladder to drain out, because the exit is right at the bottom. I ought to try weaning myself off the bottle, standing on the one 'good' leg and perhaps kneeling on the other.

Anyway, I had last night was quite a good one. Both being exhausted, and the TV being pretty much a desert, we decided to turn in at about 9:30pm. I emptied the bottle and then settled myself down with the final two episodes of Hitchhiker, which was followed by some Dire Straits and David Bowie. I think I finally put the light out at around 11:30pm, and had a fairly restful night. I had decided not to drink lots of water – just enough to keep me comfortable – so there wasn't too much peeing. Pat was quite late getting up, so I emptied the bottle at 9:30am.

By 3:10pm, after about four cups of tea and two of coffee, the level reached 1040ml. I emptied it and didn't pee again until 5:35pm, when I produced a rather average 200ml. It's 5:55pm now and I feel quite comfortable in a pair of shorts that has a fly and a button, which I can leave loose (until today a lot of my trousers have, I'm sure, been aggravating the bladder discomfort).

I'm finally getting over the lethargy. This afternoon I decided to tackle the job I always leave until the last minute filling in and submitting my Self-Assessment Tax Return. To my delight, I had it done in not much over an hour I've got it done well before the deadline for having anything I owe added to my tax code rather than getting a bill for a lump sum. However, unless I've made a mistake, I think that for the first time in years HMRC owes me money rather than the other way round. We'll see...

Yesterday I was wondering why my waterworks were still so sore, but then I remembered that the catheter had only been out for two days. It seemed longer.

I can't believe that it's two weeks since the operation and 12 days since Pat liberated me from the hospital. At this rate, my six weeks in a cast will just fly by (he suggested – hopefully). It's only three and a half weeks until the next (and maybe last?) hospital appointment – and normal walking.

I feel fat, flabby and lazy – I can't wait to get out and do some walking. The serious boots are clean, waxed and ready...

One other problem is hopefully on the way out. It's been really hard work emptying my bowels since I got home I have to push incredibly hard to get things started, and the first bit feels like passing a golf ball. The GP gave me some laxatives that make the bowel muscles work better, but yesterday I asked Pat to get something to soften the stools. I took three yesterday and this morning's effort was better, but still hell to get started. It's pie and mushy peas tonight, and they usually help...

### **Saturday 20 September 2014**

Having emptied over a litre of urine out of the bottle this morning, I finally decided something must be done about my bladder. I was by now pretty sure I had an infection, in spite of not having any very serious symptoms. I went to our GP practice website and found that, not only are they now open on Saturdays, but they open at 8am six days a week. Funny, that, because I tried phoning before 9am a while ago

and couldn't get a response. Then it was revealed on the site that the extra opening hours are for pre-booked appointments only and the phones are not manned.

Next step phone the after-hours number – 111. This was really good. I told the charming lady all the details, including the fact that I wasn't really in any state to get to the Primary Care Walk-In Centre at Bassetlaw hospital. In no time at all she had passed my information to them and a few minutes later they phoned to say that someone would be out to see me sometime this morning. And a few minutes after that, a cheerful-sounding male nurse-practitioner rang to say he was on his way. Incredible. He did a few essential checks and then dug a pack of Trimethoprim out of his goody-box. This is an antibacterial – not an antibiotic – like the Nitrofurantoin Pat gets when she has an infection.

So that's one major problem dealt with – I hope!

As for the other, no luck with the stool softener and the mushy peas this morning – the first day I haven't been able to push past whatever the barrier is. I'm going to up the softener dose to the maximum of five a day today, and also try the Bisacodyl peristalsis-boosting pills I got from the doctor tonight.

Still on toilet-related stuff, Pat insists that you can only empty your bladder fully when standing (which can't be much good to her!). Having had a look at the anatomy, I think she's probably right. I hadn't worked out how to do this yet, but a few minutes experimenting showed that, starting from the bed, I can get down on my knees. More important, I can get up again without much difficulty and without putting the bad leg at risk. So I have now had a couple of kneeling wees, and things do seem to run a little more freely. I can't imagine the bladder being affected by the position of my lower legs.

That lot ought to make this a good day, but both our Samsung Galaxy mobiles stopped working properly as phones the other day. I've spent hours wandering through the labyrinth of settings menus, and all I've found is that on both phones all outgoing calls are shown as blocked. And when I tried to reverse this I was asked for a numeric password. I assume this is the pin for the SIM card, and I've searched all over the place and failed to find any of the SIM packaging. I wasted an hour on the Tesco Mobile website, which sadly doesn't have an online chat support service, finally speaking to a young woman who seemed totally vague about issues like mine and could only suggest that I do things I've already done, and if those fail I'll have to go to my local Tesco phone store. Luckily we did recently acquire one of these in Worksop, but neither of us felt much like going today. We have agreed on Monday afternoon and in the meantime I've reincarnated my old Nokia clamshell phone which, even if not exactly 'smart', does at least make calls and will therefore service in emergencies.

## **Sunday 21 September 2014**

I spent quite a lot of time yesterday wrestling with the phone problems, but with no success. Examination of stuff buried very deep in the call settings, I discovered that both phones showed that all outgoing calls were blocked. Any attempt to unblock them resulted in the phone demanding a numeric password. I couldn't recall ever putting such a thing into the phone but tried wild guesses for a default – 0000, 9999, 1234 etc – and all the PIN numbers we use for various purposes. Result? Nothing.

I remain deeply disappointed with Tesco Mobile's customer support line, and particularly the absence of an online live chat facility – something I have found very useful on various providers' sites.

During the day I had taken four of the stool-softening pills. At bedtime I took a fifth, plus two of the peristalsis-boosters.

Last night was reasonably restful, though I did wake up several times to pee, and practised my new strategy successfully. By around 600am I needed to empty the bottle as it was becoming dangerously full – imagine the long-term consequences of spilling a whole litre of pee on a pure wool fitted carpet!

After our traditional Sunday breakfast of porridge – or 'porage', since it's made with Scott's Old-Fashioned Porage Oats – with milk and Lyle's Golden Syrup (out of a tin, not a squeeze bottle – I'm sure that's a different product, thinned down for easier use in baking) – I was getting alert signals from my bowels. Even more, when I retired for another kneeling wee I wasn't sure I was just weeing. Once I had battled my way onto the loo, yesterday's pill-popping was splendidly rewarded. No need to push hard (so relief that there probably isn't anything sinister blocking the way), and my first really fruitful poo since the surgery. Even better, about three hours later I had to go for another one. I'm going to stick with the pills, probably until I'm up and about, when normal exercise should restore me to normal habits.

I did a short lap in the sitting-room with the zimmer a short while ago. It's still horribly hard work, so I guess my arms and shoulders aren't as strong as they used to be, but at least my hopping technique was quite a bit more effective. We'll be going to Tesco tomorrow afternoon, so a repeat of last Tuesday's antics getting in and out of the house.

Given that our smartphones are both out of commission, I've dug out my old Nokia and Pat's old Samsung and, after a bit of confusion, got the number off the Samsung. They are both pay-and-go, and they both have some credit on them. However, the Samsung has the most and I couldn't trace the number anywhere – it was a new pay-and-go SIM that we got from O2 so we could transfer Pat's credit to that before we swapped her number to the new phone. Complicated? Oh yes! Anyway, we now have two functioning phones to use for emergencies until Tesco sort our smartphones out.

I'm happy to record that there is no tenderness when I prod my lower abdomen now and very little discomfort when peeing. My gut is a whole lot less bloated after my two poos. This in turn means that I can wear shorts with tight elastic waistbands, which I couldn't stand a few days ago. Such are my post-operative preoccupations! Seriously, though, I feel so much more comfortable today than I have since the operation.

940pm an early night because Pat wanted to get to bed. For some reason I've been very tired, so with luck I might get off to sleep fairly quickly. I've just had the third poo of the day – not spectacular, but not negligible either!

## **Tuesday 23 September 2014**

The high spot of yesterday was getting ourselves to Tesco and back, once I had established that someone was manning the mobile phone department (a little add-on at the end of one aisle). We went after lunch, going through the complexities of getting myself out of the house.

It's weird I seem to forget how exactly I managed to get out last time between excursions – not that we've had many. In fact, I think this is the first time we've gone anywhere except the hospital. Anyway, I managed to get the zimmer and myself over the stupid door-frame onto the step, and then onto the paving and into the car. It seemed the phones are okay, so it can only be a problem with signal strength or a network fault that is making both phones behave erratically. We do know that our house is a really bad place for radio signals the windows are leaded and we have a massive iron spiral staircase in the living-room, which might be soaking up the waves. My great little portable radio which I keep on the bathroom window-sill needs its aerial leaning diagonally across the window pane.



So, reassured that the phones behaved normally out in the real world, we shopped, which entailed me wheeling the full length of Tesco and back twice, with various other little detours, which I handled quite well.

Back into the front door was hard, but I was able to hOperation onto the step.

Having said that, I was pretty tired when we got back, and quite happy to turn in early when Pat decided to do so. I had been using the bottle a lot, so I emptied it before I turned in and again after one of what seemed like a lot of pees at around 4am. By breakfast time it was emptied again, so I had produced in excess of two litres through the night, and I had only drunk about half a litre of water. In between I had slept really well, barely waking for my visits to the bottle and going straight back to sleep afterwards. The pee was flowing freely, without the strain I'd got used to. And with only a very little irritation, so I hope the infection has more-or-less cleared up.

A nothing sort of day today, except for another epic shower after coffee.

### **Wednesday 24 September 2014**

Another better night, though this time after emptying the almost-full bottle at around 5am I was struggling to get back to sleep. My old worry mechanism had cut back in, with such helpful notions as 'What if the infection is still here after the last pill?'. I read for half an hour or so and cat-napped until around 830am when I heard Pat moving upstairs. The first cup of tea was very welcome indeed!

I was solidly constipated when I tried the loo, in spite of three DulcoEase through yesterday and two BisaCodyl at bedtime. It's 12:30pm now, the bottle is almost full again and still no movement. It's going to have to be baked beans for lunch.

### **Friday 26 September 2014**

Things are settling down to a steady routine now, so not too much to report.

The bowels seem to be getting their act together, aided by plenty of baked beans, a huge pan of pistou soup made by Pat, with masses of vegetables – yes high-fibre soup, folks! - and, coming up shortly, haddock, chips and mushy peas. The chip-shop peas seem to have far more laxative powers than those we cook at home using Batchelors dried peas – maybe it's the dye that gives them such a scary bright green colour.

Tonight I take the last antibacterial tablet for the bladder infection. I'm pretty comfortable now, shifting quite a lot of fluids through the system I empty over a litre of urine from the bottle every morning – it was actually about 430am this morning and again later in the day, and there may well be a third trip to the loo. It's really nice to do a normal pee when I'm sitting on the loo, after so long weeing in a bottle. The inner workings still feel slightly tender when I'm passing urine, but I'm hoping this is just the last after-effects of the catheter.

Yesterday's high spot was a trip to the Village Hall for flu jabs. I wanted to wheel myself, but Pat got impatient – said she could push me much faster. This was true, so in the end we worked out a collaboration in which she provided most of the motive power, with me pitching in every time we went up a slope and also providing course correction, needed because our wretched pavements slope quite steeply towards the road and the wheelchair has a strong tendency to turn downhill. I find that quite light friction with a hand on the uphill wheel's – what is it handrail? - corrects this very well. It was probably about a quarter of a mile each way, so a welcome breath of fresh air.

It's still a struggle getting in and out of the front door using the zimmer. My upper-body strength doesn't seem good I have to lean forward to put most of my weight on the frame, rather than taking it on my arms, so that I can swing the 'good' leg up or down the step. Having got up onto the step, I had difficulty turning round to plant my

bum on the waiting wheelchair, and did momentarily put a bit more weight on the bad leg than I should have done. On reflection, I should have had the chair further inside the door and taken another hOperation over the threshold.

Today has been pretty uneventful. I had a shower before lunch, with a minor – and quite amusing mishap. I have to swing across from the loo-seat, with a 180-degree turn, to sit on the edge of the bath, and then use both hands to lift and shift my bum along to the end. I think it was because I had left the wheelchair too close to the bath, because partway there I lost my balance and fell – quite slowly – backwards into the bath. I caught myself on my hands, so no harm was done. I probably swore quite loudly as I fell, because Pat called to ask what I had done. 'Come and see,' I replied, now convulsed with laughter. Then, without too much difficulty I was able to use both hands and the 'good leg to get myself up onto the corner seat.

### **Sunday 28 September 2014**

Friday night was very disturbed. I just couldn't get to sleep for more than a few catnaps – or, at least, that was how it felt. On Saturday morning I was very tired indeed.

Pat collected grandson Barney – all 17½ years and getting on for six feet of him – from home in Sheffield late in the morning, beginning a really enjoyable, if short, weekend with him.

Asked what he would like to watch on TV during the afternoon, he chose – to no surprise whatever – one of the DVDs of appendices that came as part of the extended edition of The Hobbit An Unexpected Journey. We have watched the whole Lord of the Rings trilogy in extended editions several times and always enjoy the behind-the-scenes stuff that reveals the immense effort that has gone into all Peter Jackson's Tolkien films.

Before dinner, we had a brief conversation about other films we might watch, with me doing a hard sell for the three Hannibal Lecter films that followed The Silens of the Lambs. Meal over, Barney decided he would like to watch The Godfather Part II (we watched the first film of the trilogy a year or so ago). However, first he had a date in the kitchen to make a chocolate cake with Pat.

Then he loaded up the first of the two DVDs, which finally ran out at about 945pm, after Pat had gone to bed.

I had a much better night last night. I must have slept a lot and only awakened a little, because by morning I had only bottled about 300ml of pee – compared with a litre or more most nights.

I had assumed that he wasn't very bothered about the film, as he had been doing stuff with his phone every time I looked at him. But this morning he announced that he would like to watch the second disc. This took us through until nearly lunchtime – and a splendid Sunday fry-up, including Pat's amazing scrambled eggs.

Barney has gone home now, and things are very quiet. It's good to know, though, that a 17-year-old still finds us interesting enough to want to have the occasional sleepover with us old 'uns.

It's 530pm now, and I have produced about 800ml of wee since breakfast. It's now coming up to 48 hours since I took my last dose of Trimethoprim and the storage and passing of urine, while not perfectly comfortable, is fairly pain-free. At least, if the infection does flare up again it will do so during the week, enabling me to get a rapid response from the surgery.

We have nothing special on the agenda for what sincerely I hope is going to be the last two weeks of my rehabilitation, apart from a delayed visit on Friday from Pat's

lovely niece Bex and her even lovelier baby daughter Anya. That will be a treat – and an excuse to make a special lunch.

And, hopefully, there shouldn't be anything to report here for the next few days...

## **Tuesday 30 September 2014**

It's now three weeks and four days since the surgery and things have really settled down. More importantly, from my point of view, it's one week and six days until my next hospital appointment. I need to be a bit careful about expectations, but I'm hoping that the cast will come off then and that I'll be allowed to walk normally on the repaired ankle, even if I have to give it a little help with the crutches. The official rehab time was six weeks, but because of the stupid business with the bandages the next appointment will be five weeks and three days after surgery. Surely the odd four days won't affect recovery...?

I had a look at my account of the original ankle replacement surgery after writing the last paragraph. I had my first follow-up appointment 11 days after the operation and my cast was replaced with The Big Black Boot. I was able to take this off to wash the leg and even to sleep without it if it felt okay. I was also told to try taking 'some weight' (whatever that meant) on the foot while wearing the boot. By the end of the next two weeks – three and a half weeks from the operation – I was walking short distances using both feet without the boot. Obviously the bonding of the implant to bone was faster than that of bone to bone. I was able to walk with no artificial aids or support just one month after the operation.

The water works still don't feel 100% normal – there is still some sensitivity, maybe due to the battering my urethra took with the inserting and removal of the catheter – but it's now four days since the last dose of Trimethoprim and I'm pretty sure the infection has gone. I'm producing plenty of fairly pale-coloured and clear urine – I just (5pm) emptied about 1200ml from the bottle, which was last emptied before breakfast.

## **Friday 3 October 2014**

I have been feeling a bit guilty about not making any effort to get more mobile. The wheelchair makes everything pretty easy, but I really ought to try to get up on the crutches, so today I've done several sets of 10 repeats lifting myself out of the chair with the 'good' leg and both arms, with hands on the arm-rests. The full 10 is quite hard, but the arms recover quite rapidly.

The problem, of course, is that the 'strong' leg I need to walk with crutches is the left one, which is the one for which an ankle fusion was planned for the 22 August until this was overtaken by the sudden and dramatic failure of the right ankle. I've had a couple of sharp reminders in the past two days that the left ankle is not as strong as I would like. On both occasions I was going through my 'bedside prayers' routine with the bottle when, getting myself back up onto the bed from the kneeling position, I had a sudden violent pain in the top of the foot. This seemed to centre among the complicated mass of thin bones and tendons, so was apparently nothing to do with the weakness of the ankle joint itself. I must remember to mention this to Mr Milner on the 13 October.

On both these occasions I wasn't wearing the neoprene support and the AMS splint, but even with these I feel the need to be very careful with the foot, so any experiments with the crutches would probably be a bad idea!

Whatever happens with this operation, I really must try to train myself so I'll be able to use the crutches confidently after the left-ankle fusion if I decide to go ahead with it. The right knee is the worry, so I'll need to strengthen that as well as the arms. This will mean regular sessions of moving around the house – and maybe outside – with

the left foot off the floor. If I am able to do this, it will make recovery from a fusion far easier to cope with.

Meanwhile, the right foot is more-or-less pain-free now. The odd twinges which I interpreted as 'healing pains' have pretty well stopped and the ankle feels comfortable when I move it around inside the cast. So I hope I won't have much more to report over the next 13 days...

### **Monday 6 October 2014**

I'm feeling pleased with myself this evening.

The loo seat in our downstairs bathroom has taken a bit of a hammering with my 14½ stone sliding on and off it at least once a day. Yesterday I had to tighten the screws that attach one of the hinges to the wooden seat, which I did by packing the holes with short lengths cut from cocktail sticks. This bit of improvisation lasted less than 24 hours, so this afternoon I managed to detach the seat completely and tighten everything up. Working from the wheelchair, and actually sitting on the seat while I loosened and tightened one of the wing-nuts that hold the seat on the pan, I managed to give the seat a full service and reattach it.

This was followed by trimming my grossly overgrown beard, shaving under my chin and having a shower and shampoo in the corner bath.

By the time I had finished all this I was quite tired, but feeling very satisfied to have done something useful rather than just sitting around.

### **Tuesday 14 October 2014**

I expected the last week to drag terribly, but the weekend came along quite quickly and suddenly it was The Big Day – 13 October, the day of my next hospital appointment.

And, it turned out, the day of the NHS workers' four-hour strike. So, at 9am I was on the phone to the Royal Derby to find out if the afternoon clinic would be affected. I contacted them at the third attempt and was assured that clinics would be going on normally. As a former NHS worker who fully supports the staff's campaign to have their contracts honoured and the independent pay-body's recommendations implemented, it would have been ironic to have my big day spoiled by industrial action!

After a lovely day on Sunday we got the promised wind and rain, which would make the drive down to Derby more difficult.

I had what I hoped would be the last of my complicated seated showers and passed on my usual two strong coffees in favour of one cup of tea (so that I wouldn't be embarrassed by too many trips to the Gents). We had decided to leave early and have lunch at the hospital – hopefully at the Costa coffee house just inside the main entrance – so that we would be covered for any serious delays, so we left at noon for a 210pm appointment.

So it was the usual – and, I hoped, the last – complicated set of manoeuvres to get the wheelchair and me from the house into the car. I wheeled myself to the front door, where Pat had already parked the walking frame, and managed the two difficult steps over the bottom of the door frame (why do the makers of modern hi-tech UPVC frames make getting through a door so much more complicated than it used to be with the old wooden ones?) and down the 100mm brick doorstep. The rest was easy – a few zimmer-hops to the open door of the car, a quick pirouette and my bum hit the seat.

In the event, the drive down was easy in spite of the horrible weather and the endless road works on the M1, and we made it to the Royal Derby Hospital in an hour and a quarter, giving us just under an hour to kill before my appointment.

To our disgust, Costa was jam-packed – not a single table where I'd be able to dock the wheelchair. So we decided we might as well go straight to Orthopaedic Outpatients – a mere ten-minute walk away – and try our luck with the refreshment kiosk run by the 'The Friends'. We got a quite-decent ham and coleslaw sandwich on wholemeal bread and a bag of crisps to share, a coffee and a chocolate and settled in for the long wait.

I also had a trip to the disabled loo. Unfortunately the handrails around the WC offered no help, so I had to pee in the bottle, sitting down, then empty it, flush the loo and wash the bottle. All of this was managed fairly easily.

Claire came through and stopped for a brief chat while we were waiting. It seemed that the saga of my urinary crisis had spread. She had heard all about it and said it could have been really serious, even leading to kidney failure. So the mess the nurse had made of my bandages before my discharge and the refusal of the District Nurses to touch it with a bargepole, followed by Claire's suggestion that we went back to the hospital the following day, had been fortuitous – as had Mr Milner's immediate decision to have me catheterised.

A little later – and well before my appointment time – I was called and wheeled into the plaster room. The cast was finally removed to reveal the dried-up, scaly, flaky, scabby remains of my lower leg – not a pretty sight. I tried a little gentle flexing and extending, but the ankle joint was quite stiff and the skin felt as if it might tear at any moment. We were given an x-ray form and set off on the slightly scary journey to the nearby radiography department. Scary because I had not yet been given the all-clear for the ankle – the foot was overhanging the footplate, and the thought of it colliding with something wasn't pleasant.

X-ray was quite busy, so we had a frustrating wait of about half an hour. Then I had to deal with the difficulties of getting myself out of the wheelchair and onto the table with a completely unprotected and possibly vulnerable ankle, and then getting the foot in the positions needed for the two x-rays – one for the front view and one for the side view.

Then, with me clutching my little ticket, we went back to Waiting 2.

Everything seemed to be conspiring against the possibility of my getting a verdict quickly. We waited for about 20 minutes and then were installed in an examination room. The only entertainment here were the two x-rays, miniature versions of which were displayed at the side of the screen. We could see enough to think the alignment of the ankle replacement – which I have seen on x-rays many times since the original operation in March 2006 – looked good. There was also a thick white line running through the heel bone obviously the screw Mr Milner had mentioned.

We waited again, hoping to be visited at any moment by Claire, but we didn't even hear her voice from the corridor.

Eventually, after perhaps half an hour, Mr Milner walked in and immediately asked me not about the ankle but about the bladder. Obviously that had been much more of an emergency than I realised. When I told him I had been producing an average of about three litres of wee a day he looked happy, but he did ask – light-heartedly, I think – whether I had gone ahead with a 'prostate re-bore', the operation the GP had suggested as an alternative to the tamsulosin capsules I've been taking.

Finally – and almost as an afterthought, it seemed – he pulled up the full-size x-rays. The alignment of the implant looked good, he said, and everything else seemed fine, so I could start 'jumping around' on the foot. I remarked on the size of the screw,

which he told me had a 6.5mm diameter. I estimated the length at about 70mm (just under three inches), which made it as long as and thicker than the biggest woodscrews I keep in my workshop.

Then we got down to a more realistic rehabilitation plan, with a progressive build-up to full weight-bearing. I suggested using the crutches to take some of the weight off the foot at each step, gradually reducing the support as it got stronger. He was happy with that and said he didn't want to see me for three months, which I took to be an expression of his confidence in the success of the surgery.

He suggested some sort of compression sock to help with the swelling, and I offered one of my neoprene ankle supports as a short-term option. He was happy with that.

That was the sort of news I'd been dying to hear. The outcome of the operation had been the best of the three possibilities, and now the outcome of the first stage of rehabilitation was pretty optimal too.

We went back to the waiting room, both of us ready for the loo. I put on the sock and trainer I'd brought in anticipation of a good result (the bad one would have been another cast and still no weight-bearing), then levered myself upright and tried balancing using the crutches. To begin with, the right foot felt seriously weird – very wobbly, as if the foot wanted to tilt outwards. It was obviously going to take a while for nerves and muscles I hadn't used for almost six weeks to start working properly again.

After a couple of false starts I managed to walk to the nearby Gents, using both crutches to support each step taken on the newly-repaired foot. To my amazement, there was hardly any pain – just mild discomfort coming mostly, I thought, from the scabs on the various incisions.

Then came the first real treat I was actually able to pee standing up, with the crutches just dangling from my forearms and my weight distributed equally between the two feet. Bye-bye, bottle!

Then it was cagoules on and back in the wheelchair for the return journey to the car. Getting back in was a lot easier, knowing I could put weight on both feet.

I just couldn't stop chuckling with delight, even when we came up behind a monster tailback from the road works on the Markeaton roundabout, which had caused us no problems at all on the way to the hospital. Then an easy drive down to the recently remodelled Abbey Hill roundabout and a clear run up the A38 for most of the way back to junction 28. However, a couple of miles before the junction, we were brought to a standstill, then to a miserable intermittent crawl. When, after about half an hour, we finally got to the junction, there was traffic gridlocked in all directions. The sliproad down onto the M1, when we finally got to it, was an almost-stationary two-lane queue as traffic battled to filter onto the motorway. Three lanes were in operation in spite of the roadworks, but it took some minutes for us to slot ourselves in and then a few more before the traffic got anywhere near back to the 50mph temporary limit.

The rest was fairly easy, if not very fast, but we were very relieved indeed to reach junction 30 and turn off for Worksop.

As we parked at home, Pat asked if I wanted her to fetch the zimmer. No thanks – I would try with the crutches.

The difference between walking with only one usable leg and having at least some support from the second was astonishing. Walking on the level was easy, and when I came to the doorstep I just stood on the bad leg and two crutches and stepped up with the 'good' leg. Easy. And even easier over the door-frame.

And what did I do as soon as I was in the hall? A sharp left turn into the bathroom and the sheer indulgence of another proper, normal pee.

I told Pat to leave the wheelchair in the car boot, at least until today, and we focused all our limited reserves of energy on getting two cups of tea, two biscuits and me into the sitting-room.

Home at last!

During the evening I came to the conclusion that the zimmer was better for moving around the house than the crutches, so that is what I've been using. The technique that has evolved overnight and this morning is simply to wheel the frame, resting as much weight as feels comfortable on the handles, and walk as normally as I can.

I had decided, as soon as I tested my limited walking capabilities, that I wouldn't try getting upstairs immediately. I would sleep downstairs and use the bottle during the night as I didn't want to have an accident stumbling to and from the bathroom in the dark.

I had planned to have a long, lazy bath during the evening, but in the end I made do with sitting sideways on the loo-seat lid with the right foot in a bidet full of lovely warm water. I gave the scaly monster a thorough soak, a good wash with Pears soap and a careful dry with a towel. Then I basted the foot and lower leg generously with 'Bottle o' Butter', a cocoa-butter based moisturiser we'd bought after reading about it in the Sunday papers.

I had another restless night, but this one was due more to excitement than to anxiety.

Around 830am I heard a lot of banging of vehicle doors outside and remembered that the gardener who had cut our grass would be coming back to do it again this week. I couldn't hear Pat moving upstairs so I did a pretty efficient job of getting up and dressed, including the complex support structure of sock, neoprene support, Andy Murray Special and trainer for the 'good' ankle and the other sock and neoprene support for the 'bad' one.

Then I fished the cheque-book out of the filing cabinet and found that the garden man had cut the grass on Thursday – not Tuesday. No worries – wide awake now, I decided to go and put the kettle on, do my usual morning ablutions and then settle in the kitchen with a cuppa and the BBC News channel.

So I stood up (with very little difficulty) and, for the first time, noticed something really weird. I felt like Tolkien's wizard, Gandalf, in Bilbo's and Frodo's hobbit hole, Bag End. Everything in my cramped office/bedroom seemed to have shrunk.

It was the same in the bathroom, where I brushed my teeth and washed my face standing up. The basin seemed an awfully long way down. I was distracted from this temporarily by the joy of using the bidet for the first time in almost six weeks. Then, when I arrived in the kitchen, the effect was even more dramatic.

From the wheelchair, I had been seeing everything from a viewpoint about two feet lower than normal, and had apparently got used to this. Now, seeing things from much higher was really strange. The worktops, the table and chairs – everything looked positively shrunken. It was fascinating, funny and at the same time rather unsettling.

However, I managed to brew a pot of tea, turn on the TV and settle myself in my old position at the head of the table – I had been sitting at the other end with the wheelchair so I didn't get in Pat's way.

It's now 130pm. I've walked around the house quite a lot, aided by the zimmer, have enjoyed my normal rations of tea and coffee, have moved fairly effortlessly to and

from the bathroom and have enjoyed several proper grown-up wees. Now I'm off to have lunch.

At 6pm, 24 hours after getting home from the hospital, my mobility around the house has developed really well. I can get up from my armchair without using my hands and can walk with the zimmer, simply wheeling it and resting as much or as little weight on it as I need. In the kitchen I just steady myself with a hand on a worktable or the table.

The right foot, just out of its cast, feels reasonably comfortable. The heel is rather tender when I put weight on it – deep 'bone pain' rather than surface discomfort – but not enough to cause problems. There is also some sensitivity at the bone level along the outside of the foot, but this has been there, on and off, ever since George gave me a horrendous yank on the lead some months ago.

The left foot is probably more uncomfortable than the right, but I'm putting this down to all the stress it has suffered in its role as 'the good foot' while the other wasn't weight-bearing, and I'm hoping it will feel better when the right foot is really pulling its weight. But I need to remember that, prior to the total collapse of the right heel, the left ankle was diagnosed as needing emergency surgery! In view of this, it is doing pretty well with the aid of the AMS and the neoprene support.

### **Wednesday 15 October 2014**

I woke early this morning after a good night's sleep, and after trying and failing to get back to sleep I decided to try re-starting my ankle and knee exercises both ankles together overhanging the mattress, extend and flex gently 16 times; then one knee at a time, lift the leg off the bed and flex and extend 16 times. Obviously I was careful not to over-flex or over-extend the ankles, because they hadn't been exercised for some weeks, but the movements were comfortable and I felt none the worse for the exercises. Later, in my armchair, I will do the knee-locking exercise.

Without the wheelchair my morning ablutions went quickly and smoothly. Then I went through to the kitchen and brewed a pot of tea, setting the table for breakfast while it mashed. By the time we had eaten breakfast both ankles had stiffened up, which was rather depressing, but after half an hour and two cups of tea I was feeling more mobile again.

I was eager to take some more control of my life, so I decided to try packing up the wheelchair to return it to the hire firm. Of course, that meant getting it out of the car boot where it had stayed since Monday's trip to Derby.

Using both crutches, I got out of the front door as easily as I had got in on Monday stand on the right ('bad') foot and both crutches; step over the frame with the left ('good') foot; follow through with the crutches and the right foot; then repeat for the doorstep. Easy! I opened the car boot, took hold of the sides of the folded wheelchair's seat in my right hand and just lifted it out like a suitcase. Then, with just the left crutch to support the right foot, I carried it to the front door. I had been fairly confident but was amazed at how easy this was.

Getting the chair and its footplates into their carton was a fidget, and fixing the straps involved me getting down on my knees and up again, which I achieved quite easily. All in all, quite an achievement after all these weeks of disability.

A quick phone-call and collection was arranged for sometime today. Job done.

A leisurely half-hour with coffee and I felt ready for anything.

Since then I've got down the much higher back doorstep and walked round the side of the house to try and open the side gate, which has swollen with the recent heavy



rain, for the window cleaner. Pulling the gate achieved nothing, but Pat was able to open it fairly easily from the outside.

While I was still in bed, I was wondering just what to try next, I decided that I needed to take stock and plan my movements carefully – not anticipating the wheelchair job and my trip halfway round the house! So I can do this now with a few new achievements clocked up.

First, the central character the right ankle. From Mr Milner's cheerful advice on Monday, I can assume that the surgery has been 100% successful and the ankle just needs working a little carefully back into its natural functioning. Basically, it's strong but stiff, so I just need to avoid putting any sudden stress on it.

Second, the supporting character the left ankle. This is a mess, but with support from the AMS and the neoprene sleeve it is working pretty well. It has been badly stressed in its role as 'the good foot' over the past six weeks, and is currently more painful than the good ankle when walking. So I will go on wearing the neoprene support over a sock, which should damp the joint's movements, and the AMS on tOperation of all that, which will limit joint movement to flex-and-extend, stopping rotation completely and also protecting against any sideways tipping.

Third, waiting in ambush, the right knee. This has had a very easy time since the operation but is now having to start work again. I need to strengthen it as much as I possibly can because sooner or later the left ankle will really need the fusion operation. But not, I'm determined, until the right ankle is fully recovered. If I can get the knee working well by then, I'll be in a much better position to deal with the left ankle surgery than I was for the recent right ankle op. It would be good to be able to manage with a zimmer and crutches rather than needing a wheelchair – though I do now know that I have that in reserve.

So really, what I need to do is to keep on the move and 'listen' to the ankles, responding sensibly to any pain signals. I want to get as close to 'normal' mobility as the left ankle and the right knee will allow. I intend to develop and pursue the exercise programme outlined at the beginning of this document.

For the short term, I think I can probably forget the zimmer and stick with the crutches for as long as I need them. That will give me far more freedom of movement around the house and garden.

The next target is to get myself upstairs, back in my own bed and using our wonderful walk-in shower...

...two out of three of which I achieved later.

Early in the afternoon I collected some toiletries and other bits and pieces in the bathroom and the bedroom/office and managed to carry them in a bag up the stairs – the first time I'd been in the bedroom for almost six weeks. I didn't risk lifting on alternate feet but contented myself with lifting on the left ('good') leg and catching up with the right. I had hung a crutch on our iron spiral staircase so that I could retrieve it at the top, and I managed to restore the toiletries to their rightful homes and get back down the stairs with no real problems.

What I did notice was that both ankles quickly became more painful when I used them a lot. This was even more apparent when, later on, I decided to take another bag of bits up and have a shower. This all went well, but by the time I had finished both ankles really were protesting, and the right ('bad') one was quite swollen.

The worst bit was getting socks, neoprene supports, splints and trainers back on. The blanket box at the foot of our bed is too high to allow this to be done while sitting, so I had to carry the stuff through to the en-suite and sit on the loo lid. The pain level was pretty high by the time I'd finished and got back downstairs, but it faded fairly

quickly. Sitting in my recliner with the leg-rest up seems to help, bringing about quite a rapid recovery. (My account of rehabilitation after the original ankle replacement surgery comments on how sore and swollen the ankle became when used but how quickly it recovered when rested.) I'm wondering whether doing the exercises in bed this morning might have aggravated things a bit. I'll go a bit gently for the next few days.

With both ankles protesting, I've developed an alternative strategy with the crutches. Rather than using them to reduce the load on just one foot, I move the crutch tips well forward, lean on them quite hard and then take one step with each foot.

Later on in the afternoon we realised that the fanlights on the sitting-room windows were still locked in the vent position, and the ones in the bedroom/office were quite wide open. I was able to deal with both of these, in spite of the fact that both involve quite a stretch.

So, all in all, a pretty positive day. Tonight I will be back in my own bed for the first time in almost six weeks, and the dodgy corner-bath showers will be no more. I have been outside at both the front and the back of the house and have covered a fair distance while out – certainly far more than six zimmer-hops to and from the car. I was particularly relieved at how easily I got up and down the high back door-step, and I'm looking forward to an improvement in the weather which will allow me to have a wander round the garden.

The wheelchair was collected mid-afternoon, which seems like a symbolic step forward.

Pat is visiting her deaf brother tomorrow, and I think she might want me to go along. A visit to Sainsbury's is planned on the way home, so I may get some real exercise.

#### **Thursday 16 October 2014**

By bedtime last night I was realising that I had got a bit carried away on my wave of optimism. Both feet were hurting a lot, and it was a real struggle to get myself up the stairs and into bed.

It felt wonderful to relax on my Tempur memory-foam mattress with the head of the bed raised electrically to a comfortable reading position. Pretty soon I was ready to abandon my aching body to – I hoped – a long, curative sleep.

As it turned out I was quite restless. I got up once – or possibly twice and hobbled through to the loo in the en-suite, but after that I gave in and used the bottle as quietly and discreetly as possible. My bladder has not yet settled right back to normality, and I'm beginning to wonder whether the extreme distension before the catheter went in has done some permanent damage.

I had hoped that a night in bed would allow the painful feet to recover, but they were still very uncomfortable. In fact, I was really stiff all over, and it took a couple of hours before my joints loosened up.

There was no way I could go with Pat this morning. The idea of doing a fairly major Sainsbury's shop on the crutches, in the state I was in this morning, was absolutely insane. So here I am with the house to myself for a few hours.

I have been refining my walking technique so that both legs get the same support. It goes like this standing with my weight evenly distributed between my feet, I plant the crutch tips a foot or so ahead of my leading foot and I take a comfortable amount of weight on the crutches before taking a step with each foot. Then, with my weight once more shared evenly between the feet, I advance the crutch tips and repeat the pattern. This works well, protecting both ankles equally and allowing me to move around without too much pain.

The lesson is that I did far too much on Tuesday and yesterday. I need to hasten slowly.

The pain in the right foot is mainly on the bottom of the heel, which feels badly bruised, and if the surgery has been totally successful, which Mr Milner seemed to think it was, it should settle down fairly quickly. There is also some intermittent pain along the outer edge of the foot, around the joint that George wrenched so badly. However, the ankle itself feels fine.

The left ankle is basically as it has been for several months – just worse than it was when I raised it with the GP on the 25 March, almost seven months ago and when, with Claire's support, I made the decision early in July to try the alternatives to surgery first. This is hardly surprising, as it has been doing double duty as the 'good' ankle since the operation on the 29 August.

So, for the next few days, I need to take things a bit gently and stick to the new crutch technique as much as possible to protect both ankles.

### **Friday 17 October 2014**

By the time I got upstairs last night both feet were hurting badly. It was while I was taking off shoes, AMS, neoprene supports and socks that I started wondering whether the supports might be causing some of the pain. Why? I have no idea, but I decided to try managing without them this morning.

I had a much better night's sleep, in spite of needing to get up three times to pee. I had decided to try coping without the bottle, which meant walking through to the en-suite barefoot and with no ankle support. Fortunately our bedroom carpet is very deep and dense, and I was able to do this without too much pain. Things came a bit unstuck after the third pee at about 5am I just couldn't get back to sleep, although I felt drowsy and was not particularly bothered about staying awake. However, I was very relieved when, at about 7.30am, Pat asked if I would like a cup of tea. I finished my cup almost before she had started hers, and then managed to cat-nap for an hour or so before I got a sudden urge to get up and have a shower. I also shaved under my chin, standing in front of the mirror.

I went back to the bed and put my boxers, polo shirt and joggers on, and then started on the feet. This involved taking the bits as pieces into the en-suite because the loo seat is the lowest thing on which I can sit. I took the chance to give my right leg and foot a thorough basting with Bottle o' Butter before putting on my socks. Then just a trainer on the right foot and a trainer and the AMS on the left – so the roles of my feet were officially swapped the right had no protection at all, which just six weeks after surgery – made it the 'good foot', and the the left had the AMS, making it the 'bad foot'.

It is now 3pm. By the standards of this week I've had an averagely active morning, while sticking to the method of waalking with the crutches described yesterday, and I'm in no doubt that both feet are considerably less painful than they were by this time yesterday. I'm particularly aware of the absence of the neoprene under my insteps.

The achievement of the day has been unpacking and assembling the Morphy-Richards 9-in-1 Steam Cleaner which arrived from Amazon earlier in the week – though I did almost all of this sitting at the kitchen table.

I also had to search the Web for distilled/purified/de-ionised/de-mineralised water, without which the steamer can't be used. I was pretty appalled by the cost of this simple commodity, even on Ebay, until I found CarPlan De-ionised Water on the Tesco website. This is still sold for topping up car batteries, which is pretty amazing as I can't remember having to do this for at least 20 years, but it is also recommended for steam irons. This costs around 1.20 for 2.5 litres and in some

places under £2.00 for 5 litres. Since finding this, it has disappeared from the Tesco site, but I'm sure we'll find it at either the old-fashioned car spares shop or the equally traditional hardware shop (the old word 'ironmongery' seems to fit better) in our neighbouring village of Langold. But that is for tomorrow.

Longer-term, I think a clean bucket and a muslin-lined sieve on a rainy day will work out even more economical.

None of this last bit has anything to do with ankle surgery, except that it proves I'm keeping my mind active!

Now at 5pm, while still painful, both feet are feeling much better than at the same time yesterday. I have walked right down our long garden using the crutches and been upstairs and down again without the crutches once. I find this very encouraging, but it does raise the question of why the neoprene supports seem to have caused discomfort. On the 2 and 3 September (above), just before the surgery, I recorded the pain I was experiencing with some shoes which seemed to be squashing the instep areas of both feet. I haven't noticed anything similar since the surgery but it does seem that something tight around the foot is causing pain.

It will be interesting to see whether the pain continues to diminish...

### **Saturday 18 October 2014**

Another frustrating night, with good sleep interrupted by several visits to the loo, the last of which, at about 4.45am, left me unable to get back to sleep – a repeat of yesterday morning.

I don't think I missed the neoprene supports yesterday, and in fact I think my feet were less painful yesterday than before. That is not to say they don't hurt – they definitely do! The bottom of the right heel, towards the inside edge, feels a pressure when I stand on it, and there is a bruised feeling. Pat said yesterday that she recalled Mr Milner mentioned that it would feel bruised. I don't remember that, but it is reassuring, suggesting that the right foot is behaving as expected.

Really I'm more concerned about the left one. This, after all, is the foot I'm trying to look after to avoid surgery, and at the moment it is pretty painful. I have to keep reminding myself that this foot has been doing double duty for six weeks, carrying my full weight in all kinds of bizarre and unfamiliar manoeuvres. Getting into and out of the wheel chair and into and out of bed, onto and off the loo and various chairs – it really was all very demanding!

So, to be positive, I need to believe that the right foot is recovering normally from the surgery and will soon be as good as it has been through all the years since the ankle replacement was done. If the work on the bones in the heel has been as successful as Mr Milner obviously thinks it has, then this is a perfectly reasonable expectation.

Then I need to believe that the use of one or more splints and maybe a stick at times, together with being careful, should be able to get the left foot back to where it was while I was walking George, back at the beginning of June, and keep it usable and reasonably comfortable for some time.

Finally, once the right foot is fully operational, I need to get the right leg strong enough for a more bearable recovery period when and if I do opt for the left ankle fusion. This means I must be gentle with the right ankle until it is fully recovered, which should also give the knee a rest. Then, when the ankle has recovered fully I need to start exercising it and the knee seriously to build up strength and durability.

All of which is going to take some time...

So right now the priority is to put as little stress on each ankle as possible, giving them a chance to recover. This will be achieved by doing as little as possible with my

full body weight on my feet, using the crutch-walking technique described above, which protects both legs equally. It is hard on the arms, though I have noticed that my shoulders are both uncomfortable in bed! That in turn means that I need to start a programme of mobilising and strengthening exercises for arms and shoulders. I would normally do these as part of my normal routine, in a standing position, but that obviously means all my weight will be on my feet, so I need to try the exercises sitting – on my library stool would be good.

### **Sunday 19 October 2014**

At last, a decent night's sleep. I had decided to walk absolutely as little as I could without the crutches, so I took these upstairs with me and used them to get through the ablutions and into bed. I read until my eyes just wouldn't stay open any longer and slept until...well, I'm not sure, but I think the first trip to the loo was quite soon after midnight. Then, to my amazement, the next was at 717m! This was amazing, but very welcome, considering that we had had a second cup of tea around 10pm.

I had used to crutches for both pees and the ankles felt pretty good after the second.

I managed to relax and cat-nap until Pat came to at about 915am, when we enjoyed a leisurely cup of tea together.

I had decided the previous evening to try a change of footwear, to see if I could reduce the pain in both feet, and had dug out my ancient Scholls' foot-massage sandals from under the bed. I tried fitting the AMS to the left ankle without a sock, but it obviously needs the stability of a 'real' shoes. So as soon as I got downstairs I switched to the other - much less aggressive – support I had got from the Derby OT's.

The library stool had found its way into the conservatory sometime this morning, so I decided to try the 'top half' of my neck-shoulders-back exercise routine. This worked pretty well, and I was even able to do the side bends for the lower back. I didn't get round to trying the rest of the exercises on the floor today – they'll have to wait until tomorrow.

It's now 530pm, and I'm writing this after a late dinner. There is still a fair amount of pain, but nothing like as much as yesterday evening. I really have tried to avoid more than the odd few steps around the kitchen without crutches.

At one point shortly before dinner the right heel was becoming very sore and the whole ankle was quite swollen, so I put one of the neoprene supports on in lieu of a compression stocking. We'll see how it looks at bedtime...

### **Monday 20 October 2014**

The ankle was still a bit swollen when I took the support off at bedtime, but I had another really good night.

I had taken the crutches upstairs again, so when I got up for a pee around midnight and again at around 5am, getting back to sleep very quickly after each, the walks to and from the loo were a lot easier. I came to again around 730am and then just drifted until some time after 8am. Around 815am I decided to do some gentle ankle and leg exercises. First flexing and extending the ankles, but smoothly and without straining the joints. Then, instead of the full rotations, just side-to-side rocking. Finally the flex-and-extend exercises for the knee. After a short break, and on the way to getting up, I sat on the edge of the bed and did the lower-leg lifts. 16 repeats of everything.

Pat was still out like a light, though she did wake briefly to ask the time. I got dressed. I decided to stick with the Scholl's sandals, but once downstairs I also tried walking with bare feet and found this the most comfortable option of all.

I did my ablutions, made a pot of tea, laid up for breakfast and listened to *Today* until 9am, and as there was no sound from upstairs I decided to have my breakfast. Then I poured a second cup of tea, put it on the tray and actually managed to carry it through to the sitting-room in my right hand without spilling a drop. My left hand managed one crutch and carried the other. Pat was really surprised to see me sitting in the recliner with a cuppa – the actually, I think I did this with a coffee last Wednesday while she was out.

It's now 12:30pm and I've just walked without crutches from the office to the front door to collect the post. The right ankle and foot are really feeling better this morning, and it's the left ankle that is the more painful. This is encouraging, because it means the ankle operated on is now recovering more quickly.

But I face a dilemma. I had resolved to keep the protection as consistent as possible, never walking any distance without the support of the crutches, but now I'm wondering if I should let the right ankle do more work. Decisions, decisions...

I really need to get a full programme of exercises under way and follow it rigidly. I think strengthening both legs will be a priority as the ankle continues to improve.

After writing the last paragraph I needed to go upstairs for my wallet. For no particular reason I decided to try going up the spiral staircase 'properly' – which means using alternate legs rather than doing all the lifting on the left leg. To my amazement, I managed this all the way up. However, I decided not to try it on the way down, because I think the stress on the ankles is greater, and also because the right leg is the one with the dodgy knee.

**3pm** I have just finished my first full round of neck, shoulder and back exercises, using the high stool for the upper-body moves and the floor for the rest. It all went better than I had expected, with no real stress on the ankles. I just need the determination to keep this up – twice a day, at least. Considering that I haven't done any of these exercises for some months, they felt – and I now feel – remarkably good.

I will continue to do the ankle and knee exercises in bed and, as the joints become stronger and more mobile, see what else I can do to build up strength, such as dips and sit-stands.

## **Tuesday 21 October 2014**

A good night's sleep with several trips to the loo – without crutches after the first – but with no problems getting back to sleep after any of them. I did careful ankle and knee exercises in bed before getting up, and managed to get a cup of tea onto the spiral staircase for Pat to get from the tOperation– I think it will be a few days before I can carry one all the way up without spilling it! Then I went back to the kitchen for my cup – again, two at once might be risky! Not so much as a slop with either, though.

I decided to put on sports socks with the soft support from Derby OT's on the left – now definitely the *bad* – ankle and a neoprene support on the right ankle to keep the swelling down.

After breakfast (or after coffee – I'm not quite sure which) I did a complete set of neck, shoulder and back exercises followed by some additional knee work on the recliner. This works really well rest the legs in a slightly bent position on the rest and then lift the foot to lock the knee, hold for about four seconds and then relax. 16 of those on each leg leaves the quads tingling pleasantly.

Then a lovely long shower. I found today that if I lean back on the walls and steady myself with one hand I can lift one foot up for washing without the standing foot feeling too painful. However, both feet have become increasingly uncomfortable through the afternoon, as usual.

I took the support off the right foot this afternoon because the heel was getting sore. I think this is either the scarring settling down or perhaps some nerves healing. At times it felt as if someone was pushing something sharp into the back of the heel. I'm considering putting a plaster on to stop the socks and supports rubbing. There is also a more achey pain that seems to be inside the heel bone, which comes and goes through the day. Hopefully all this is healing stuff. Considering Mr Milner sawed the heel bone in two, re-modelled it and screwed it back together with that enormous screw, it really doesn't feel bad!

On the plus side, I think I'm managing to wean myself off the crutches. I decided to stop using them upstairs after the first trip to the loo last night, and have done some walking without them during the day. The left ankle is quite uncomfortable, but nothing I can't cope with. I think there's quite a bit of weakness and stiffness in the legs so my walking is a bit dodgy, but that is hardly surprising after five weeks using the wheelchair.

### **Wednesday 22 October 2014**

A very encouraging start to the day. I was concerned yesterday that the right ankle was quite swollen – not huge but a hard, stiff swelling. It had been the same the previous evening and seemed to have gone down overnight, but I put a neoprene support on it and this did reduce the swelling by bedtime.

I was up for the look three or four times through the night and felt that I was walking better, barefoot and without the crutches, than previously. This morning the swelling had gone right down and the ankle felt really good – a contrast to the left one, which felt quite sore and weak.

I did the morning's in-bed exercises at about 830am, got dressed, collected my denture from the *en-suite* and, feet protected from the cast-iron stairs by the Scholl's sandals, went downstairs. The sandals really aren't very comfortable, and I'm much happier in bare or stockinged feet, so I abandoned them at the bottom of the stairs and tackled the tea-mashing and ablutions routine. Then I poured two cups of tea, deciding that I would try carrying both cups on the little tray we use for this purpose, deliver mine first and then, if all was going well, see if I could carry Pat's upstairs without disaster.

So, back into the sandals and up I went, only lifting on the left foot, and got to the top with only one very small slop. Pat was both appreciative and impressed, and I was thrilled to bits with this achievement. It's small steps like this that keep me encouraged and motivated!

I've now got sports socks on both feet and the soft support from Derby OTs on the left one, and am quite comfortable. Maybe I should try the trainers...

Since writing the above, I have just done today's full round of exercises, finishing with an extra 16 repeats of the early-morning knee lifts.

### **Thursday 23 October 2014**

I made a decision last night to try putting my trainers on this morning – the first time I'll have worn shoes on both feet since the day of the operation. This was partly because I need to take another step back to normality and partly because the Scholl's sandals are really uncomfortable.

So after the exercises in bed this morning I got dressed and put on some Wilson sports socks, then the soft support on the left ankle and the Reeboks. When I stood up I found it really hard to balance for a couple of minutes, but I managed to get downstairs without problems and go through the usual morning routine of tea-making, ablutions and talking a cuppa up for Pat.

By the time we had finished breakfast I was walking fairly normally, with a reasonable pace-length on both sides, putting each foot down heel-first and rolling onto the toes. I'm hoping this is the start of another important chapter in the rehab story...

It is 11am and I have just finished my neck-shoulders-back mobilising routine plus 16 of the leg lifts with knee flex and extend, followed by eight sit-stand exercises on a dining chair. The last set seemed to put quite a strain on the left ankle, even with the soft support on.

After lunch I decided to take the trainers off, as I was not sure whether they were supporting my heels properly. In particular, the pressure between my heels and the shoe soles seemed uneven. There was also some mild pain below the outer ankle bone in my right foot, which was reminiscent of the pain I had when 'my leg was falling off my foot', as I described the situation to Mr Milner; however, I think this is just residual tenderness in the new incision scar, which has not really settled down yet, aggravated by pressure or rubbing from the shoe. I will try putting the shoes back on later.

### **Friday 24 October 2014**

In fact, I didn't put the shoes back on until I needed their protection on the stairs at bedtime. By then the feet and ankles were quite stiff and painful and I was very relieved to slide them under the cool cotton sheets.

This morning, as usual, they felt a lot better, but there was still some residual swelling of the right ankle. On other mornings it has gone right down, but not this time. Pat has gone to the library so I've asked her to get me some compression stockings, which is what Mr Milner said I should use to control the swelling. Better late than never!

The left ankle wasn't brilliant this morning, with the foot turning outwards quite badly as I walked. However, the Derby OTs' soft support seems to be protecting it fairly well, keeping the pain down.

I want to start some careful walking as soon as possible, but it's rather damp outside this morning and I don't want to risk slipping. I don't intend to be too ambitious – perhaps out to the front gate and back to begin with, and then adding a few yards up and down the pavement.

The way the right ankle is feeling I think driving might be a possibility fairly soon, too. Or am I being just a little over-optimistic...?

I contented myself with repeating the exercise routine I did yesterday, finishing at about 3pm.

### **Monday 28 October 2014**

On Saturday morning we decided to go to the Welbeck Farm Shop, mainly because we couldn't think of anywhere else where we could be sure of getting quite a lot of beef shin for a monster stew. I took both crutches and Pat dropped me off at the entrance to the yard, about a 50-metre walk to the shop entrance. I found myself instinctively using two crutches to support the old 'good' ankle rather than the recently repaired 'bad' ankle, which I took for a good sign. This will be the method needed when I have the fusion done. The right ankle is actually feeling pretty strong now, though it does get quite swollen by the evening, and both ankles are actually pretty painful by the end of the day. I'm coping better with the trainers now, but I prefer to walk on stockings or bare feet in the evening. The bruised feeling in the right heel is fading gradually and the under-side of the heel doesn't feel so 'lumpy'.

Anyway, by the time Pat had parked, I had had a good look at the artisan breads and was in conversation with one of the butchers. They had to unhook a fore-quarter of



beef in the hanging room to get our requested two kilos of shin. Once that was sorted out we had a minor shopping binge, buying a dozen sausages, a dozen rashers of their superb home-cured and smoked bacon, a couple of butterfly lamb chops and a big gammon steak so share, and then collecting an assortment of breads.

I walked right back to where the car was parked with any difficulty, which was very satisfying.

On the way home we had a brief stop-off at our village Co-op, where I decided to try walking with one crutch, also to support the left ankle. We covered most of the aisles, and I was pretty relieved to get back in the car, but I didn't really have any problems – though standing still was the most taxing bit.

We were expecting my stepson Alistair and his family for a sleepover on Sunday, so Saturday afternoon was serious cooking time. I sat at the kitchen table to cut up the two kilos of beef and then on the library stool at the sink to peel three kilos of potatoes. At last, I was able to make a useful contribution to the cooking!

We were both pretty exhausted by the time we packed up – too tired to bother cooking a meal, so we made do with a snack in front of the TV.

We had a lovely couple of days with the family, with me managing to be pretty mobile, walking around outside to make decisions about some of the jobs Alistair was doing for us, and today I still feel as if the repaired ankle is making progress. It was still slightly swollen when I got up this morning, though. Pat hadn't managed to get a compression stocking because the pharmacy said I needed to go to the surgery and get a nurse to measure the leg and write a prescription! As that was back when I wasn't walking far I decided not to bother.

Having done my mobilising exercises conscientiously every day last week I have been as stiff as a board all weekend! I left them over the weekend and feel a little less stiff this morning, so should I do them again this week or not?

Now that I'm managing to walk reasonable distances, it might be an idea to start regular measured walks, gradually increasing the distance day by day. If I do, I think I should wear my recently-revived mountain boots...

My lower legs felt really grim after lunch, but a few minutes ago I went outside feeling I was walking well enough to take out the wheelie-bin. Unfortunately Pat had just beaten me to it, but I was able to walk almost normally. I go through spells of worrying how long the recovery is taking and then being amazed at how much better I feel today than yesterday. For the last couple of days I haven't used either the soft support or the AMS – just a neoprene sports support over my left sock.

I really feel as if I'm regaining control of my life!

### **Thursday 30 October 2014**

I had a lazy day yesterday as Pat was out all day with friends. However, I did fit in a full set of exercises and brought in the empty wheelie-bin with no problems.

Apart from a little tenderness around the big new operation scar on the right heel, the repaired ankle feels more and more normal. I probably need to change my way of climbing and descending stairs to use the right leg more and the left one less, but the right knee is still a bit of an obstacle to that – I feel very unconfident about coming down on that leg rather than the left one, in spite of the dodgy left ankle. I hope the sit-stand exercise will strengthen the knee, even if it doesn't cure the pain..

We have a visit to Sainsbury's scheduled for later, and ought also to go to Aldi as I've run right out of red wine!

**Later...** We went first to Aldi, where we nearly filled a large trolley, and then to Sainsbury's where we completely filled a small one. I opted to drive the trolleys, which gave me something to lean on. The legs and feet were not exactly comfortable and, when I had to stand still while Pat spent lots of times looking at things she was never going to buy, they really were screaming after a few minutes. However, we did it, although I had to hand the trolley over to Pat when we came out of Sainsbury's and walk back to the car with the one crutch I had brought with me supporting the left ankle.

By the time we had unloaded about eight very heavy bags and unpacked the frozen and chilled stuff we were both pretty well exhausted. We left the rest and retired for coffee and biscuits.

What was encouraging was the fact that my pain faded fairly quickly.

### **Monday 3 November 2014**

I had a fairly lazy weekend because our 17-year-old grandson Barney came to stay over Saturday night. This meant many hours in front of the TV watching a Rolling Stones documentary followed by a concert and the final two discs of appendices to *The Lord of the Rings* (extended edition).

This morning I've been able to go up and down the dreaded spiral staircase twice, using alternate legs properly both ways – though the right leg (the one with the mended ankle and the knackered knee) needs a lot of support from my hands and arms. I need to sustain this kind of activity now, with the aim of getting the right leg performing as normally as possible before having the left-ankle fusion.

I was really pleased at how normally I was walking when I got downstairs this morning. The left foot turns out pretty dramatically and is quite weak, but the right leg seems to be behaving quite normally and the ankle feels really strong now.

I did the usual ankle and knee exercises in bed and a full set of lower back exercises (ten repeats) downstairs before I went up to do something I haven't done since before the surgery changing the fitted sheets and pillow-cases on our Tempur divans – something I normally do every Monday morning. I managed really well, so I'm feeling pretty chuffed.

The next target is to start a structured programme of walking. I'm going to wear my mountain boots for maximum ankle support, at least to begin with, and start cautiously, building up the distance. I will take one crutch to use on my right arm to support the left leg.

Until a few days ago I suspected that my post-operative urinary problems might have done some permanent damage to my bladder, but I just realised that it has felt much better over the past few days. That really is a relief, because I had already been receiving treatment for an enlarged prostate, which had me getting up for a pee four or five times a night. This was about halved by a drug called tamsulosin, but the frequency had gone up rather dramatically after the post-Operationcatheter had been removed. Now things really do seem to be settling down.

The bowel function has also been problematic since the operation. I started taking over-the-counter DulcoEase to soften stools and prescribed BisoCodyl to enhance peristalsis back in September, but 'opening my bowels', as the nurses call it so elegantly, has always been incredibly hard work, quite painful and intermittently bloody. I have tried to maintain a steady intake of pulses, with chip-shOperationmushy peas being by far the most powerful laxative, but until a few days ago every morning has been a bit of an ordeal. Then, in Sainsbury's pharmacy last week I found something called FiboGel. This is a fine granular powder that comes in sachets. It looks, and behaves, very much like powdered gelatine but its active

ingredient is called Ispagula husk. Like gelatine, it absorbs water very rapidly. I take a sachet of the powder after breakfast and the evening meal, stirred into a glass of cold water. It is lemon-flavoured and a bit gritty, and you keep discovering little blobs of the gel tucked away in odd corners of your mouth, but it acts as a bulking agent, absorbing large quantities of water to magnify and soften the stools, producing a really comfortable poo.

Given that my bowel functions have always been erratic, I think I would be happy to take this for the rest of my life. In pursuit of which, a little later, I ordered five packs of 30 sachets from [www.chemistdirect.co.uk](http://www.chemistdirect.co.uk) for £22.24 – 30p per day or, as I'm pretty regular, per poo! From where I'm sitting, that's pretty good value.

At 12:30pm I had my first walk of about 250 metres each way. I put a pair of nicely padded walker's socks on over the sports sock on my right foot and the sports sock plus the neoprene support on the right one. Then I laced my feet quite tightly into my Asolo leather mountain boots, took up one crutch and set off. The right leg felt fine and the left ankle, while a little sore, was no real problem. I used the crutch on the right side to give a little light support to the left leg, and this worked quite well. When I got back I had some muscle pain in my right lower back, but this faded as soon as I sat down. I think I'll repeat this every working-day morning this week and then increase the distance for the following week. That is a baseline routine, but I will also do any other walking that's needed.

I had hoped that the left boot would limit how far my foot could turn outwards, but I don't think it made a lot of difference.

## **Tuesday 4 November 2014**

I don't know whether it was the walk or not, but my legs and back were horrendously stiff when I got moving this morning. I had done the usual ankle and knee exercises in bed, but nothing else until after breakfast. However, I then did ten repeats of all the neck, shoulder and back exercises in the hope that this would undo the knots. They did, and I was planning to go for my second walk later.

Then something much more exciting got in the way. Yesterday I had a little play with the car around our forecourt, and found the pedals perfectly manageable, so I decided that today was to be my first real driving day. We needed to collect our prescriptions and get them to the pharmacy, so I decided to do this first. The surgery and the pharmacy are only about the same distance from home as yesterday's walking destination, but the pavements are horribly tilted and uneven (which is what, in Derby, did for my right ankle), so I decided to drive to the little precinct car park, walk the 50 metres or so to the surgery, pick up the prescriptions, take them 30 yards back to the pharmacy and then walk the 20 metres back to the car. Then, if that went well, I would drive to the next village up the A60 and get a long-overdue haircut, and finally I would pick the medicines up on the way home.

All did, indeed, go well. By the time I had got the car out of the front gate it was as if I had been driving every day. I returned around an hour later with all our meds and a very close buzz-cut, feeling none the worse for the experience – and very pleased with myself. I had taken the crutches in the car but had not felt the need for them at all. I was limping on the left foot, but not too badly, and the left ankle only felt mildly painful when I declutched.

I have been pretty active around the house since then, walking the length of our garden several times and managing to kneel by the pond to clear the pump intakes, so I decided to pass on my second walk today.

I feel that I am making definite progress every day now. The right foot is pretty well back to normal and the left one is quite manageable.

Just after writing that, I took one of our wheelie-bins out to the gate without difficulty!

### **Wednesday 5 November 2014**

This morning, I brought the bin back in again and then went up to the local Co-op for a little last-minute shopping in preparation for entertaining Pat's sister and brother-in-law for lunch.

As yesterday, the driving was no trouble, though the left ankle was more painful than yesterday when walking and particularly when I depressed the clutch pedal. I had decided to try the soft support from the Derby OTs, which has a strong elastic figure-eight strap. I wondered whether this was the cause of the extra pain, so when I got home I changed into one of the neoprene sports supports and was much more comfortable for the rest of the day.

Otherwise, an enjoyable but uneventful day.

### **Thursday 6 November 2014**

I have the house to myself this morning, so I watched the final part of Brian Cox's *The Human Universe*, then did a full 10-repeat set of neck, back and leg exercises, including 10 stand-sits on a dining chair. Unlike some other days, I actually feel better for this today.

I am wearing one of the neoprene ankle-supports and the left ankle feels much better than it did when I wore the soft support from the OTs yesterday. It was quite weak and painful when I got up, but was stronger and far more comfortable after I had moved around.

Yet again, I used the code on a pot of Yeo Valley yogurt to enter an online holiday competition – unsuccessfully. Then another minor landmark for the first time since the beginning of September, I used a spoonful of the yogurt to inoculate a 1.2-litre batch of home-made yogurt, which involved a bit of contortionism searching in a seriously inaccessible kitchen cupboard for a container.

With coffee I started watching the incomparable Taylor and Burton in *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf*, a movie I remember with great fondness from many years ago and which I found on DVD fairly recently. Pausing this after coffee I glued and cramped a badly collapsed kitchen chair back together – a full-length split in the seat, two detached legs and three rung joints.

Feeling quite virtuous - except for the fact that my plans for a programme of walks this week seem to have got sabotaged by all sorts of domestic pressures! - I am now going back to watch the much-loved Burtons tearing each other to shreds in glorious black-and-white.

I had a very light lunch of chicken pickings and an Eccles cake and then decided to light the wood-burner. This is now well warmed-up to provide a cosy welcome for Pat when she gets home. The crawling around and getting-up routine is a bit taxing, but the legs and ankles are coping quite well.

The inedible parts of the chicken have now been boiling for nearly two hours, so I will be decanting the stock soon.

We had a lovely cosy evening in front of the wood stove.

### **Friday 7 November 2014**

I was horrendously stiff when I got downstairs this morning, with sciatic nerve pain and a nasty spasm in the back muscles, but this all eased out fairly quickly.

I had quite a busy morning.

First, we decided we wanted something from the roof space of the garage – luckily something fairly easily accessible to me in my normal state, but a bit of a challenge to my dodgy legs. I had to extend the ladder and go up about five rungs, then rearrange all the boxes on the edge of the roof opening to get access to the one we wanted. The left ankle and the right knee were both protesting while both ascending and descending, but I managed the job.

Flushed with success, I decided to add a bottle-bank visit to my scheduled trip to the Co-op this morning. Our backlog of empties – mostly wine bottles despite my reduced consumption after the operation – had grown to rather horrific proportions, totally overflowing the milk crate we use for storage. I loaded up no less than three very large French polypropylene shopping bags before I could lift the crate, and carried all these out to the car. Then round to the bottle bank behind the Village Hall and on to the Co-op. This filled two of the bags to the point where I could barely lift them, but I managed to get them through to the kitchen and, to my amazement, neither ankle seems to have suffered too much.

Walking around the Co-op caused me far less grief than any of the recent shopping trips, so I think the repaired right ankle is pretty well fully recovered and the mess of a left ankle seems to be remarkably variable in its response to stress.

Apart from that lot, most of the day has been taken up with sorting out an insurance claim, giving me a very welcome sit down.

I haven't done any exercises today, and I think I will pass on these. Tomorrow will probably be fairly taxing as stepson Alistair is demolishing our bedroom so that the insurance plumbers can fix a leaking pipe. I doubt if I'll get away without doing a bit of labouring.

### **Monday 10 November 2014**

In fact, I did enough heavy work in advance of Alistair's arrival to leave me in some trouble through the weekend.

I needed to move all our bedroom furniture as far away as possible from the side where he would be removing a stud wall. The two single divans that fit together to make our king-size bed are equipped with electric rise and fall mechanisms for the back- and foot-rests, making them very heavy. The Tempur mattresses are also pretty weighty. Add to this the effect of the luxuriously thick carpet we inherited with the house and moving the beds is strenuous work. We also have a large and heavy pine blanket chest (also inherited with the house) which seems to contain about a hundredweight of linen. It is a pretty rough piece of carpentry, with rough-sawn wooden edges digging into the carpet. Finally our two pine three-drawer bedside cabinets are also quite heavy.

By the time I had moved all these items and dustsheeted them, I was thoroughly tired and full of new aches and pains, and the left ankle was particularly painful for the rest of the day..

This morning, however, once I had moved around enough to ease the overnight stiffness, I found that that I was walking fairly easily. I'll be doing a full set of mobilising exercises as soon as my breakfast has settled.

I whipped the yogurt I made on Thursday to get rid of the lumps this morning. It looks almost as rich and creamy as the Yeo Valley product I used to inoculate it.

I am now waiting for the plumber to come and repair the leaky pipe, which he should be able to do easily after Alistair cleared the decks for him on Saturday.

After he had found not a trace of a leak, or indeed of any dampness in the area which, a few weeks ago, was very wet indeed, I decided that I will need to get the home insurance company to send out a loss adjuster to assess the damage.

In between times, I started my first batch of bread since some time before the surgery. This is the sourdough I have been making since March 2011, using the culture I brought back from The School of Artisan Food and the method I have developed over the ensuing 4½ years. This involves making a starter the morning before baking day, mixing this with flour and water at bedtime on the same day to produce a sponge and making the dough the following morning. This is then developed over a few hours and baked around midday. I am currently making focaccia.

With yogurt and sourdough both back on the agenda, I feel that life really is returning to normal.

### **Wednesday 12 November 2014**

Yesterday was another physically taxing day. The first couple of hours were occupied with the sourdough bake, which is only mildly strenuous, but while the loaves were proving I decided to take advantage of the good weather and pressure-wash the slippery coating off the decking bridge that spans our garden pond. This had been getting dangerously slippery and really needed doing.

In my weakened condition this turned out to be far more taxing than I thought. After putting on the mountain boots, I took a long electrical extension down the garden to the shed and then wheeled our very heavy Karcher pressure washer out of the garage. This had to be lifted up and down various steps on the way to the pond. I plugged the extension into the socket in the shed and the washer into the other end. Then I had to go back up the garden to get the hose reel from the log store, connect it to the outside tap and pull the hose end down the garden. Once I had been back up to turn on the water I was good to go, if a little weary!

Standing still, oddly, has been one of the less comfortable things I have to do since I got the use of both legs back. After a few minutes my legs become quite painful. So standing at the end of the bridge and playing the Karcher's powerful Dirt Blaster wand back and forth several times over each of the decking planks was more difficult than anyone with the full use of their legs would think.

Anyway, the job was done in about 20 minutes and then, of course, all the bits had to be put away.

A little later, a local builder arrived to estimate for sorting out the water-damage once the utilities insurance people had fixed the leak. This involved a trip upstairs and a bit of crawling around on already weary legs. The builder was confident that he had identified the source of a very slow leak within a couple of minutes.

Then, much later, the engineer from the utilities insurance arrived. This meant several more trips up and down the stairs, a visit to the garage for some tools he hadn't got and quite a lot more crawling around, as he first established that the builder had been wrong and then found the real leak.

We managed to eat our dinner, with a few interruptions, while he was replacing a length of pipe, and finally got settled for what was left of the evening around 8pm.

Today's task, now that I have done a full set of exercises, is to clear up the debris left by Alistair and the engineer in my little bedroom/office. We're using this as an opportunity to clear a lot of rubbish out and reorganise the room – something we've been planning for some years!

But first some lunch and a first taste of the focaccia, which has an excellent open texture, is nice and moist and just a little oily and defrosted very well in the microwave.

### **Thursday 13 November 2014**

I managed the clearing up, though it wasn't easy.

First I had to box all the stuff that lived on the tall flatpack shelf unit which has lived in the corner below the leaking pipe.

Then the unit itself had to be dismantled, as we have decided to rearrange the bedroom/office completely. This involved laying it flat and then crawling around it on my knees to undo all the screw with my trusty Makita drill/driver. I then had to take the various bits of veneered chipboard out and stack them in the garage. The two long boards are quite heavy, but I managed to carry them – one at a time – out of the back door, down the high doorstep and out to the garage, with both legs doing their job quite well.

Next, I had to shake out and fold the three dust-sheets that had caught most of the debris. This left quite a large pile of plaster dust and chunks on the carpet, so it was back on my knees with the dustpan and brush and a heavy-duty black bin-liner.

Finally, I had to vacuum up the finer material which hadn't yet reached the bag. Our trusty Sebo vacuum-cleaner was flashing its bag-full/clog light, so I replaced the bag and cleaned the filter. After that it went through the thick layer of dust effortlessly.

Job done and me fairly well knackered!

Today I have been doing some of the admin work around the insurance claim, giving the body time to recover from the stresses to which I have subjected it. Considering what it has been through, I am really surprised how easily I have been walking today.

I have just done a full set of exercises, which felt quite a bit more comfortable today than on previous days, and I feel much better after the set than I have on previous days. I think I'm really beginning to benefit from them.

I must get myself out walking...

### **Saturday 15 November 2014**

On Thursday night, because the insurance claim is moving rather slowly, I suggested that I put our bedroom back together. Pat was very pleased, because she has been very uncomfortable in the downstairs bedroom. So have I, to a lesser extent, so I thought a move upstairs would be worth the effort. So yesterday morning I set about the task.

The first problem was a hole in the stud wall about a metre square, exposing the bedroom to the drafty, dusty eaves loft. I cut a length of wood and nailed it across the top, and then stapled a doubled dust-sheet to this, with a bit of spare at the top, bottom and ends, each of which was lightly stapled to whatever was behind it.

Then I had to sweep and then vacuum the plaster chunks and dust up before I could roll the carpet into its correct position, and then vacuum that. Unfortunately I didn't think I could manage to get the Sebo vacuum up the spiral staircase – and if I did I might not manage to get it down again, so I had to use my Mum's ancient AEG cylinder machine. The carpet nozzle doesn't beat and sweep the carpet the way the Sebo does, but it's a lot easier to push around!

Having vacuumed the exposed carpet I then had to manhandle Pat's bedside cabinet back into its normal position. It is only a four-drawer pine chest-of-drawers, but I can only just lift it off the floor. I've never dared to ask what is in those four drawers!

Next it was the turn of Pat's divan which, bearing in mind the weight of the electric adjustment mechanism and the extra-deep Tempur memory-foam mattress, is also quite a challenge for a man in my condition. I have to slide it rather than lift it, which isn't easy on our deep-pile carpet. I pulled it just far enough away from my bed to allow my legs in between, and then stepped into the gap and used my legs to push it the rest of the way.

After a repeat performance for my bed and my smaller, lighter bedside cabinet, it was the turn of the blanket box. Again, apart from the bedding and towels at the top I have no idea what is in this rustic pine construction, but it takes some serious moving. The only way to get it back where it belongs is to pull one end out, pivoting it on the other end, and then repeat with the other end (if that makes any sense at all). That puts it straight and a short distance away from the beds. I then push the second end back in, pivoting it on the first, followed by the first end pivoting on the second. That puts it back against the beds but further over. Phew!

In between all this, of course, I had to vacuum each freshly exposed patch of carpet.

Then our bedding had to be brought back upstairs and the beds had to be made – a fitted sheet on each, followed by two pillowcases on each side. We had also decided it was time to restore our wonderful John Lewis king-size four-seasons duvet set to winter mode. This involves press-studding the 9-tog and 4½-tog quilts together before fitting the assembly into the duvet cover, buttoning this up and shaking it out to distribute the down evenly. Luckily, because the filling *is* pure down, the whole thing is amazingly light.

By the time I had got the essential bits back in place I was good for nothing else but a beard trim, a long hot shower and a shave, but the real reward came at bedtime, sliding down under the duvet with the sheets and cover fresh and cool.

By comparison this morning's labours very relatively light a drive to our local Asda (because they are still selling our favourite ground coffee at two bags for a fiver) to fill a small trolley, followed by a quick run to the village Co-op for a few things we had forgotten to put on the Asda list!

The legs, and particularly the left ankle, were sore and weary by the time all this was done, but have recovered pretty well in the past couple of hours.

It is now three o'clock in the afternoon, and I can't wait for bedtime...

## **Sunday 16 November 2014**

This morning I passed another landmark. Rather than let Pat walk up to the local shopping precinct for *The Sunday Times* (yes, I know it's a Murdoch paper, but she likes a lot of the stuff in it and the culture magazine has excellent TV listings – and anyway I balance things by reading the *Observer*), I decided to have a go myself, thereby fulfilling my intention to start walking again. The distance is about the same as the one walk I did several weeks ago, but instead of putting on my mountain boots I decided to try it in trainers, with only a neoprene sports support over my left sock.

I've found the pavements between home and the precinct a nightmare ever since the left ankle began to fail I'm always walking with my feet turned in or out on the badly-laid asphalt. So I was rather cautious when I set out, using a crutch on my right arm to help the left ankle (the right one can now be left to fend for itself). To my amazement, I was able to set a decent pace – enough to make me breathe a little hard - and sustain it all the way to and then all the way *from* the shops. The two-litre bottle of milk and *The Sunday Times* in my shopping bag (I'm not sure which was the heavier) were straining my back on the way home, and the right side of my lower back was burning by the time I got in, but the legs felt pretty good and I felt better in myself for a bit of deep breathing.



This has to be the beginning of a sustained programme of walking at least five days a week with gradually increasing distance.

I have an app on my phone called *MyTracks*, which I used to record one of my last walks before the operation. It uses GPS to track the walk and records it, replaying it using *Google Earth*. It also stores the data and displays statistics my last walk covered 2.43km in 34min 41sec, giving an overall average speed of 4.21km/h, an average moving speed of 4.41km/h and a maximum speed of 4.74km/h. The reading of 125kcal is nonsense because the phone doesn't know my weight (at least, I hope it doesn't, but they're sneaky bit of kit, these *Android* machines!).

If I record all my walks I will be able to control the increase in distance and, I hope, speed.

Now, several hours later, I feel none the worse for the walk, and the knot has gone from my back. I think that is down to all the one-sided effort that was involved in getting around while I was forbidden to load the right leg.

### **Monday 17 November 2014**

I got up at 8am today, a little earlier than has become my habit since the surgery. I am determined to stop making excuses and get down to regular walking.

I did a full set of exercises, including the ones I have been doing in bed but have now moved downstairs, before breakfast. Then, as soon as I had had my after-breakfast cuppa and phoned the builder (again!) I set out for a walk. I hit the record button on the *MyTracks* app and set off at a decent pace, only giving the left leg light support from the crutch. I walked a little further than I did yesterday and then carried on past home to repeat the previous 500m walk. So the total distance was around twice as much as I have done in one go since surgery. That is encouraging.

Eager for statistics, I took my phone out on the doorstep, only to discover that the GPS hadn't been turned on! So the only stat I got was the duration of the walk – 14 minutes 22 seconds. The GPS is now on ready for tomorrow.

I had kept up a healthy pace, enough to have me breathing deeply, and sustained it all the way. Careful route-finding around the uneven pavements had avoided the worst cambers, so the left ankle wasn't too stressed. Now, a short while after getting home, it feels no worse for the experience. The right lower back was protesting again, but not as much without the combined weights of milk and newspaper!

In fact, the left ankle is behaving quite oddly. It gets quite painful during some vigorous activity – such as moving the beds and the blanket-box! - but recovers quite quickly. However, it also gets painful when I have been sitting still for a long period, and takes a few steps to loosen up. Bad as the joint is, according to Mr Milner, it does seem fairly resilient. And, oddly, it seems to get more relief from the over-the-counter ProSport neoprene support than from either of the devices from the hospital. Having said that, though, I don't think I am going to want to carry on very long without surgery, even if it doesn't get any worse. Decision time may come at the review for the surgery on the 19 January.

Oh yes – the right ankle! I had almost forgotten the one that is supposedly being rehabilitated. It feels strong and secure, with only minor bits of discomfort which I'm fairly sure are coming from the incision scars rather than the joint itself. It plods happily on while I'm looking after the left foot which, I need to remind myself, was the one needing urgent surgery before the sudden collapse of the right ankle.

So the plan for the moment has to be to use supports for the left ankle and keep up the exercise for both. Mr Milner said something about exercise encouraging joints to produce more synovial fluid – the oil in the bearings – and my own experience suggests that all these exercises are doing more good than harm. This backs up my

long-held conviction that exercising damaged joints does far more good than resting them. I am sure that following this policy has kept what is actually a very dodgy spine usable for several decades.

After coffee I walked down the garden to check that the pond pump was still working. It was, fortunately, as I didn't much fancy grovelling around on the bridge cleaning the intake grilles.

Then I remembered Pat asking if I would run the vacuum cleaner round as she is really struggling with pains in her right arm. I did the kitchen first and the Sebo ran around effortlessly on the tiles. Similarly on the conservatory tiles. Then I remembered that I had replaced the bag and cleaned the filter last Thursday. The mighty Sebo more-or-less glued itself to the short-pile carpet with pure suction, making the rest of the house really hard work. I really must make a point of cleaning the filter regularly. The left leg protested continuously but not very painfully, and I managed to finish the job, feeling that I had had some real aerobic exercise to add to the benefits of the walk. Every little will help with my rehabilitation, and I am still sweating as I write this!

## **Tuesday 18 November 2014**

Because Pat was going out for the morning, I wanted to do my walk early – just in case of accidents. So, after a cup of tea in bed, I did my ankle and knee exercises in bed and got up at 8am.

This time the GPS on my phone was working properly, so I collected a crutch and started *MyTracks* before going out of the door. I did the same walk as yesterday but with a short loop to the corner shop for a bottle of milk. I tried walking without using the crutch for a couple of hundred metres, but while it was more comfortable the left ankle soon started protesting.

Compared with yesterday's 14:22 my total moving time was 15:50 – about what I would expect for the diversion to the shop. The total time was 19:09. The distance was 0.9km, the overall average speed was 2.83km/h and the average moving speed was 3.42km/h. I must have walked quickly at one stage because the maximum speed was 4.67km/h! It's interesting to compare these stats with those from my 30 July walk average moving speed 4.41km/h – over 1km/h faster – but maximum speed 4.74km/h – almost exactly the same.

Anyway, that's my benchmark set. I think a realistic target would be to repeat today's walk for the rest of the week, pushing fairly hard in the hope that I can increase the average moving speed at least a little every day. Then take two days off at the weekend and increase the distance by a modest amount for next week. And so on...

After breakfast I started another batch of yogurt before sitting down to write this. The ankle has settled down nicely with a short rest.

I did a full programme of neck, shoulder and back exercises before lunch, adding in a couple of extras. I have a nice quadriceps strengthening and hamstring stretching exercise done in the comfort of my big leather recliner. With my legs on the leg rest, I lift both feet until the knees are fully locked and I can feel the quads are really hard, counting slowly lift-1-2-3-4-down-lift-2-2-3-4-down.....lift-10-2-3-4-down. The other new one was holding both arms out in front, fists clenched, and rotating both inwards and then outwards as far as they would go in each direction, repeating ten times.

For the rest, a fairly lazy day watching an episode of the new David Attenborough nature series, repairing a broken pot, having a leisurely lunch, waiting for Christmas packages from Amazon...

The legs feel nice and relaxed, obviously benefiting from the walks, and the left ankle recovered quite quickly from the extra stress.

## Wednesday 19 November 2014

I decided to kill three birds with one stone this morning, combining my walk with buying a bottle of milk and getting our prescriptions. So I walked from home to the precinct and up to the surgery, collected the prescriptions and left them at the pharmacy. Then I continued my lap as yesterday, going right round and back to the precinct, where I collected the medicines before walking home. So this totalled up to a lap as yesterday plus a visit to the surgery and the pharmacy.

*MyTracks* clocked 1.47km in 28:59 at an average moving speed of 3.04km/h, compared with 0.9km in 15:50 at 4.41km/h yesterday. So a lot slower overall but 63% further, which is quite a jump considering the original plan of repeating yesterday's route all week!

By the time I got back to the precinct I was struggling with the left ankle, but it improved fairly quickly once I got took the load off it at home.

Before I left I had a look at the left ankle and saw that it was quite badly out of line, so I decided to try the Andy Murray Special, but I found it too uncomfortable even before I got out of the door, and took it off again. The ProSport support remains the favourite, which is ironic after all the fuss that went into getting the NHS supports. I think I might look at getting a couple of new ProSports, as one is getting very frayed and the neoprene in the other has got quite squashed.

I was surprisingly tired after this, my longest walk since surgery. However, I managed to do a complete programme of exercises later on.

## Thursday 20 November 2014

In the run-up to Christmas I always shoulder the load of routine shopping, which includes a vast quantity of baking ingredients as Pat always gets asked for lots of her goodies – Christmas cakes, mince pies and sausage rolls especially – by our extended family. A week ago, the idea that I might do the baking shop would have been pretty laughable, but this morning I decided that it would be okay.

So I went off the Sainsbury's with an amazing list, which I had put together from Pat's calligraphy on an *Excel* spreadsheet. Starting by the fruit-and-veg and doing an about-turn at the baking ingredients aisle, which are at opposite ends of the store, I zigzagged up and down the aisles, with frequent revisits as I realised that I had missed something. I ended up going all the way back to the start for oranges and lemons after I had finished at the far end (toilet rolls)! The total distance covered couldn't have been much less than that of yesterday's walk, with the added exercise value of a gradually filling trolley which, by the end, I could only just manoeuvre round the aisles – to turn a corner, I had to stop and walk the back of the trolley round until it was pointing in the new direction! It took all of ten minutes to unload at the checkout and clocked almost £230 at the till, which will give a rough indication of the quantity of stuff in the trolley.

I mentioned to the checkout lady that I was struggling a bit and she kindly arranged for a strong and fit young man to wheel the trolley to the car. That really made me feel like an old man, but I think discretion was the better part of valour if I had lost control of the loaded trolley on the sloping car park it could have done a lot of damage to parked cars!

Once home I carried in three big French shopping bags, each loaded, I estimated, with around 50 pounds of shopping, and a rather lighter cold-bag. Pat brought in all but one of the carrier-bags that the checkout lady had packed for me the odd one contained six 1.25kg bags of flour. I was amazed that neither ankle protested at the weight, and since then both have been feeling really comfortable.

I think I will call that my walk for today. Doing another one really would be pushing my luck.

I'm not sure about the other exercise programme. I suspect, from the way my shoulders feel, that three consecutive days may have been overdoing it a bit. Perhaps alternate days might be better now that I have had a head start.

### **Friday 21 November 2014**

I was quite tired after the Sainsbury's epic, so I didn't do the mobilising exercises yesterday afternoon – or go for a walk!

I still felt pretty weary this morning, but I had got myself together by coffee time. I was on 'parcel patrol' while Pat went and did some essential visits and errands. We've been ordering a lot of Christmas stuff online and we like someone to be here for take in the deliveries rather than getting a card and having to slog down to the Post Office the next day. So that was my not-very-onerous responsibility for the day. It's 2:20pm now and two large parcels have arrived from Amazon, one containing the slow cooker I had ordered a few days ago. Of course this brought out the experimental cook in me, so I made a big batch of Bolognese sauce, using one-and-a-half huge jars of Dolmio base (it has only taken about 40 years for me to realise that the Italian ingredients are probably better than anything we can buy here) and a big pack each of pork and beef mince. No messing – I tossed the meats in a hot frying pan until they lost their raw colours, meanwhile bringing the sauce base to the boil in a large saucepan. Then I combined the two, brought them to the boil and tipped the result into the pre-heated slow cooker. This has been cooking gently on the low setting for nearly two and a half hours now, with just a few lazy bubble rising round the edge, and is scheduled to get at least six hours. I'll be very interested to see how the meat cooks, because making the sauce the usual way usually leaves it a bit dry and chewy,,,

The next item I have planned is a very slow-cooked shoulder of lamb, with vegetables, for a one-pot Sunday dinner.

After lunch I did a full set of mobilising exercises, which went quite painlessly. I'm trying to discipline myself not to strain at the moves, but to do them smoothly and rhythmically.

I may or may not go for a walk when Pat comes in...

### **Saturday 22 November 2014**

I didn't. Pat had a shopping epic, so by the time she got in it was time for dinner. I drove down through the village to the fish-and-chip shop for our usual Friday meal one haddock, one 'small' chips and one large mushy peas.

Later in the evening I transferred the slow-cooked bolognese into three containers, labelled them and put them in the fridge. After six hours of cooking, the sauce looked thick and rich, though with a high liquid-to-meat ratio. It smelled and tasted really rich.

This morning I woke feeling tired, in spite of a reasonable night's sleep, and I didn't really get myself together until after lunch. I have no idea why, but I just felt really dozy and had a headache. I felt a little better after a trip to the Co-op and a cup of coffee, and by the time I had eaten my lunch – a piece of home-baked focaccia, half with Camembert and half with Bonne Maman's wonderful apricot conserve – and taken two paracetamol, I was feeling much more human.

I was also very stiff when I got up, but this also improved through the morning,

I put the 'slo bol' in the freezer this morning.

Saturdays and Sundays are going to be rest days as far as exercise goes, but from Monday I really must build up the walking. I really am beginning to feel that my rehab has stalled.

The right ankle feels strong, but I am getting a lot of painful twinges in the foot. I wonder if this is due to nerves being damaged by the surgery and gradually healing.

The left ankle continues to be quite weak and painful, but nothing I can't cope with. Depressing the clutch pedal in the car doesn't hurt as much as it did when I first started driving again. But how long I can go on before I have to accept the fusion I just don't know. I need to feel fitter, though, before I'm condemned to another six weeks without weight-bearing – let alone the next six weeks still in plaster. I would like to think that my arms, shoulders and right leg – particularly the dodgy knee will be strong enough for me to manage without a wheelchair, but I've got a way to go before this stage. I think this is important, because just getting around using these aids is far more demanding than using a chair and will help to keep me fitter during recovery.

The next appointment with Mr Milner will be a useful landmark. That is almost two months away, and by then I should have a much clearer idea of how things are. I should start practising with the zimmer and the crutches well before then – something I didn't do before the right ankle surgery.

I have started leaving my shoes off again, as I sometimes feel that wearing them is making my feet stiffer and more painful.

### **Monday 24 November 2014**

After an entertaining but fruitless ten minutes spent rummaging through our landfill and recycling bins in search of some missing presents, which we thought might have got thrown away in their Amazon packaging, I went upstairs to change the bedclothes.

This is a light week, with only two fitted sheets and two pillow-cases to change, but today was complicated by a search for the electric blanket I bought for Pat last year. She remembered taking it off the bed last spring but not where she had put it. I found it in a disused linen basket in the eaves loft, which wasn't easy because there was a 3-metre length of skirting board in front of the loft doors. I had to manhandle this over the bed before I could open the doors, but luckily the basket was right behind them.

You would think manufacturers would fit electric underblankets with permanently fixed elastic straps rather than yards of slippery polyester string to be threaded through little tape loops, but no. Nevertheless, I got the blanket fixed and the linen changed, and beat a hasty retreat to the kitchen for coffee.

Then it was time for the planned walk. I needed to visit our local Post Office, so I made that the target. I decided to wear the mountain boots, but the left ankle still struggled, especially when the camber on the pavement changed. If it slopes downward to the right, I am much more comfortable.

*MyTracks* clocked 1.15km, the second longest since I re-started my walks on the 17 November. My moving time was 21:17 and my average moving speed was 2.83km/h with a maximum speed of 3.71km/h. I have been back half an hour and the left ankle now feels very warm but fairly comfortable back in the Reebok trainers.

All in all, a pretty active morning.

### **Tuesday 25 November 2014**

I didn't get back to the diary yesterday and now, at midday, I have no clear recollection of what I did yesterday afternoon. So probably nothing worth recording.

This morning has been fairly frenetic, with Christmas shopping deliveries arriving more-or-less hourly. Two parcels were particularly heavy a gift box of La Violla foods for in-laws Bob and Jackie to guarantee them a decent Italian meal over the festive season; and the beautiful big red KitchenAid Artisan mixer which is our Christmas present to us.

In between all this, I got the insurance claim for the pipe leak back on the rails, phoning the only other builder who advertises in the Worksop *Guardian* to get an estimate and then the insurance company to make sure the claim is still alive. This time I got a charming, helpful young man who assured me that everything was fine – a great relief as the delays have been keeping me awake through the small hours.

Then there was the mystery of the Sony DAB clock radio Pat got me for Christmas last year and which died suddenly a few weeks ago. I spent quite a while searching manually through the garbage bin on her 1&1 webmail, which lacks any search mechanisms, and eventually found the relevant email from Amazon. Rthis showed me that I had just two days of warranty left, so I phoned Sony. The nice young man there told me that the product was classified as 'replacement not repair' and advised me to go back to Amazon. He gave me a code to confirm that the item was still in warranty. So I went onto the Amazon site and eventually managed to do a 'contact us' email clearly linked to the clock radio purchase. The reply, if any, will come back to Pat...

I have just registered the mixer online and will shortly be adjourning for lunch.

Pat has been out since 10:30am, leaving me to make sure all parcels are delivered, so there is no chance of a walk until she gets home. I hope I will have the energy for one later, because I really do need to keep up a regular schedule.

She got home around 3:30pm, so when we had had a cup of tea I walked down to the postbox to post my claim for a free KitchenAid ice-cream maker valued at £90. Not bad as a reward for buying the mixer. I had already claimed the KitchenAid cookbook by registering the machine's warranty.

Disappointingly, the distance was only 0.76km which I did in 13min38sec, with an average moving speed of 3.71km/h. I'll have to create an Excel table to record all this data. I walked in the trainers, doing my best to avoid adverse cambers, and the pain level in the left ankle was only moderate.

Date	Distance (km)	Time	Average speed	Max speed
17/11/14		0.60		
18/11/14	0.90	0.66	3.42	4.67
19/11/14	1.47	1.21	3.04	
24/11/14	1.15	0.89	3.24	3.71
25/11/14	0.76	13.38	3.36	3.71

That looks pretty dire! I just copied and pasted it from Excel, but it might be better if it was a *Word* table.

### **Thursday 27 November 2014**

A bit disrupted and disorganised for the past couple of days, but at least I know that driving isn't a problem for me now.

Pat and I went to Sheffield yesterday to pick up grandson Barney and bring him back here via Pat's lovely niece Bex's house, where we had a delightful lunch with one-year-old (almost) Anya. I drove both ways and had no trouble at all, even with the

satnav taking us through some of the most congested areas of the city. Bex's long, straight, steep staircase with only one bannister was another story though, the left ankle and right knee both struggling.

Then today I took Barney back to school with no backup from Pat, stopping at Sainsbury's on the way home for a tank of diesel, and again had no trouble at all with the driving. In fact, the clutch seems to be strengthening my left ankle.

This afternoon I got a bit of extra exercise clearing the decks so that a builder could assess the work needed on our water-damaged ceiling joists. There was also a bit of crawling around so I could understand what he was telling me. This looks like far less of a job than we thought – just a new piece of joist to be fastened along the side of the damaged one with claws and coach-bolts, and then the dismantled part of the stud was to be put back together.

I'll get a bit more practice tomorrow when we go to Doncaster to make our wills under a charity scheme supported by some solicitors.

So walks and exercises have taken a bit of a hit this week, but I have been active every day.

We plan to visit Alistair and family in Buxton on Sunday, which will be an even longer drive for me.

### **Saturday 29 November**

Yesterday's trip to Doncaster involved a bit more driving – around 30-35 minutes each way, with the return trip in the dark and drizzle. We parked about 600 metres from the solicitor's office, so we walked twice that.

Nothing so demanding today, but the left ankle was protesting loudly after I'd done a quick raid on the Co-op for tonight's dinner. I think the accumulated stress of quite a bit of driving on three successive days was still lurking and the shopping just topped it off. We have just watched an excellent British film called *French Film* and it feels much better. It really is amazing how it recovers from being overworked.

One thing I *am* very pleased about is the fact that my water works seem to have really settled down. Until recently peeing was still rather stingy, and I was having to pee far more often than I liked. I seemed to have lost a lot of the night-time benefits of my tamsulosin capsules. Now I'm peeing more freely and not feeling a sudden urgent need to go. There is hardly any discomfort, and – most important – I seem to be getting away with just one or two visits to the loo per night. Considering that the catheter was taken out on the 16 September – around 10 weeks ago – this has been quite a long recovery period. But well worth the wait!

### **Monday 1 December 2014**

Sunday capped the previous three days of driving with me doing the return trip to Buxton – around 100 miles and 2½ miles of driving, much of it on winding country roads. I coped without any real strain. I also got up and down Alistair's long, steep, single-banister staircase three times using alternate feet and not using my free hand on the wall. IT sounds trivial, but actually that was quite a triumph as straight staircases have been much more trouble than our spiral one up until now.

Today was a bit of a nightmare. I had decided to make a batch of focaccia every day this week, other commitments permitting, and had the first two loaves in the by about 3pm. Twenty minutes into the bake I went to check them and found, to my disgust, that the oven had stopped heating. The loaves were about half-cooked and it seemed that the element had blown – for the second time in eight years.

So the rest of the day was spent finding a repairer and then helping him to get the stupid 900mm 'range' cooker out of its slot. This was not easy, because whoever tiled

the kitchen floor had done it with the stove in place and had tiled right up to the thing's front feet, rather than tiling the whole floor and then sliding the stove into place.

After a lot of futile wrestling with the brute – trying to lift the front and pull at the same time – the repairer and I were pretty much at our wits' end when I had one of my occasional bouts of inspiration. Then the problem was that there was too little clearance at the back to allow the damned thing to tilt enough to get the feet over the edges of the tiles. So I went and got an assortment of cold chisels, bolsters and other such masons' tools from the garage and put the two most likely candidates down with their cutting edges under the front of the cooker. Then the repairer and I stood on the ends of the chisels. The front of the stove rose, we pulled – and out it came. I do love successful problem-solving!

Anyway, all this must have given the left ankle a pretty severe pasting.

The repairer didn't have a replacement element, so we left the cooker where it was.

### **Tuesday 2 December 2014**

This morning I drove solo into Worksop to get my eyes tested at Boots and pick up a few oddments of shopping. I put some semi-smart gear on, including a well-worn [air of comfy Clarks' brogues which I had worn for the trip to Doncaster. For some reason – possibly all the cavorting around I did yesterday – the left ankle was very tender, so I didn't cover much ground. However, I got the shopping we needed and had a very thorough eye-test at Boots. My new glasses – which will not be much different optically from my current pair but won't be all scratched and impossible to keep clean – will be ready a week tomorrow. And I was persuaded to get a new Boots Advantage card, which gave me 25% off the considerable cost of the specs.

I had to walk pretty fast to get back to the car before the two-hour parking ticket expired, and was very glad to sit down when I got there.

As usual, after about two hours with the pressure off, the ankle feels a lot better.

### **Wednesday 3 December 2014**

The repairer appeared with the correct element just as we were cooking dinner last night, so we put eating on hold for a while. He needed my help because something behind the cooker needed holding while the first mounting screw was tightened. I got the screwdriver. He also lubricated the back bearing of the oven fan, which is always rather reluctant to start turning, so with luck we will have a fully functioning cooker for Christmas...

A couple of weeks ago I was approached by our local Labour Party with a request to deliver some Christmas cards for John Mann, our excellent MP – he is so good that even Pat and her best friend Sue (who probably wouldn't vote for *any* other Labour candidate) owns up to having voted for him. I agreed to do the long road where we live, and as the weather was beautifully crisp and bright I decided to do the first batch of about 20 cards. Luckily they had been divided into odd and even piles and each was sorted by house-number, so it was easy to do ten or fifteen on our side and then come back on the other side.

I decided to wear the mountain boots, and also that it would be easier not to use a crutch. Bad move – by the time I was about halfway back the left ankle was really protesting. Without thinking, I had chosen the wrong directions and the pavements were both sloping the wrong way.

I completed the modest first batch and got home, but I was in considerable pain. I will know better when I do the next lot.



From then on I seemed to have loads of small jobs to do, all putting some stress on the wretched left ankle. I need to start using the Andy Murray Special again to see if it helps. I have cleaned out the woodburner, emptied the ashes into the composter, laid a new fire and vacuumed around the fireplace. I have filled and brought in a horribly heavy bag of logs and kindling. And then I took delivery of two parcels in a single consignment the free ice-cream maker for the KitchenAid mixer; and the surprisingly large Waring four-slot toaster which we decided we needed as our ten-year-old (or so) Boots own-brand model was getting seriously tatty. I have figured out how the ice-cream gadget works, washed its bits and put the bowl in the outside freezer; it will be ready for action any time after 6am tomorrow.

I did put the AMS on early in the evening, and it definitely seemed to help.

Tomorrow we have two guys coming to give the range cooker a once-in-a-lifetime clean, which will involve stripping it down and will take about five hours! Pat will be out for most of the time and my movements will be a bit limited, so I will probably be able to relax a bit. If I get a move on, I should be able to get a batch of basic ice-cream mixture ready before they arrive...

### **Friday 4 December 2014**

I didn't get the ice cream started because the oven-cleaners arrived half an hour early and we didn't have any whole milk.

At 9:30am, tightly strapped into the AMS and using a crutch, I walked across to the local shop for the milk. The splint certainly seemed to help, particularly with the adverse cambers on our horrible pavements. I was able to walk quite fast and without much stress on the ankle, so I think I had better stick with the splint. I'll be able to test it more fully when I do the next batch of John Mann's Christmas cards,

I decided to bring in the induction hob I bought for my earliest (failed) experiments in *sous vide* cooking, and which now lives in the garage. That way, if I could get my custard made, cooled and chilled early enough, we would be able to have some fresh vanilla ice cream for dessert this evening. Unfortunately, after searching the garage roof space as thoroughly as my ankle allowed (and it wasn't too bad at all, I failed to find the hob.

So I now had a large pan of cold 50/50 cream/milk mixture and caster sugar, laced with posh vanilla extract, and a large bowl containing more sugar and six egg-yolks, sitting on the kitchen worktop waiting for the cooker guys to finish. They were done by shortly after 1:30pm.

I cooked the custard, and cooled it in a bath of ice-water and then in the fridge. The sugar content seemed high the warm mixture was oppressively sweet, so I hoped the cold would numb the taste buds! I ran the ice-cream maker well before dinner but even after around half an hour the ice cream was very soft, so I filled two Carte d'Or containers which are now in the freezer.

We decided to leave it after just tasting a spoonful – delicious! - and it froze so hard that it was impossible to get a scoop into it.

### **Monday 8 December 2014**

The fact that I haven't written anything since Friday can be taken as an indication that recovery has been going well. The left ankle still gets very painful when overworked, but it's now much more manageable than it was. The right is doing really well – any remaining discomfort is really quite trivial,

On Saturday we went to the Welbeck Farm Shop to pick up eight packs of sausage meat, and of course to buy whatever else took my fancy to the tune of just over £60. I managed to walk in from the car, carry two quite heavy bags back out to the car and

then walk two or three hundred metres into the garden centre to track Pat down. Then, after a bit of browsing, back to the car and a small shop at Sainsbury's – a small trolley but a couple of full laps around the shop. The left foot was protesting by the time we got home, but I had coped pretty well.

In between, I made a batch of focaccia, but the trip to Welbeck and Sainsbury's meant that the dough was rested for too long and proving didn't achieve much of a rise. Still, when cut into pieces the bread still had a good open crumb texture with lots of holes.

I helped Pat by kneading some over-rested batches of the dreaded Raymond Blanc mince-pie pastry into submission – it's a bugger, but it's wonderful, and by Saturday bedtime we had got about ten tins of twelve pies stacked in the outside freezer.

Yesterday was sausage-roll day. We were appalled at how little Jus-Rol all-butter puff pastry we got in a roll costing over £2. I had bought six rolls from Sainsbury's and I went back on Sunday for six more plus one for luck. By tea-time we had 200 sausage rolls boxed and in the outside freezer.

I cooked a rather nondescript Spanish Chicken for dinner, but luckily I remembered to transfer a container of the new ice cream into the bottom of the fridge an hour or so before we were due to eat. A few scoops drizzled with maple syrup proved that the KitchenAid accessory was a worthwhile acquisition it was smooth and creamy and just delicious.

This morning I changed the fitted sheets and pillowcases on our beds and then, after a decent interval, cleaned the insides of the kitchen windows, which involved some pretty acrobatic stuff as the back window involves sitting on the worktop and trying not to fall in the sink.

So, all in all, the body is getting back towards something like its old self. A way to go yet I still get very out-of-breath when doing awkward manoeuvres – the product of the big belly I accumulated during my wheelchair period, I suppose – but I am managing to do more and more.

The AMS has been more comfortable to wear, but I haven't bothered with it this morning – just the ProSport neoprene support. I will use the AMS for any extended walking, though.

I need to get out and deliver some more of John Mann's cards...

## **Tuesday 9 December 2014**

...which is what I did before breakfast this morning. Wearing trainers with the neoprene support and the AMS on the left ankle, I delivered cards over a distance of 900 metres in a moving time of 26 minutes with no real discomfort from the ankle.

Then, after breakfast, I volunteered to clean some more windows – the big bows in the sitting room and front downstairs bedroom. As these have net curtains, they don't get cleaned very often, but I managed the required acrobatics after taking the curtains down. Later I would have to thread them on their wires and put them back up.

In the middle of all this, a big builder's bag (one of the white ones they deliver sand a gravel in) of logs was delivered and tipped in our forecourt. These would need barrowing round to the wood shed before some passer-by took a fancy to them.

By 2pm I had loaded, wheeled and stacked three barrow-loads, which will – I hope – be about half the total. Even with the temperature not much above freezing I was sweating heavily, my back was aching quite badly and, amazingly, the left ankle was holding up fairly well.

Time for a pot of tea and a pear – my new lunch since I weighed myself yesterday and seen the frightening reading of 14 stone 11 pounds, the heaviest I have been for the last 18 years. It's amazing what a few weeks in a wheelchair can do to you.

I got another three barrows of logs stored before it got too dark, and felt achy and weary beyond belief. However, I did manage to cook jacket potatoes, a gammon steak and baked beans for dinner before collapsing in front of the TV.

### **Wednesday 10 2014**

I was woken at about 7:30am this morning by Pat bringing tea to the bedroom, and realised that I had slept solidly through from my head hitting the pillow at around 11pm. This was a totally unfamiliar experience, as I always wake up a few times to pee and if I am awake around 4am I have great difficulty getting back to sleep.

I had an appointment at 10:30am this morning to collect my new glasses from Boots Opticians in Worksop. I also had a small shopping list to deal with, including buying some salmon for hot smoking, so I decided to go in early and do as much as possible before going to Boots. This would split the walk nicely with a sit down while the glasses were adjusted.

And so it worked out. I started by walking from the car park at the bottom of town up the hill almost to the top of the market, where I was relieved to find my long-time fishmonger, Darren. He had not seen me since before the surgery in early September, so we had quite a bit of catching-up to do. Then I managed to get most of the shopping done before the Boots appointment, by which time I was definitely ready for a sit-down.

A couple more shops to visit, and then gratefully back to the car. The ticket showed that I had been parked for about an hour and 40 minutes. I had been in Boots for about 20 minutes, so that meant I had been on my feet for about an hour and 20 minutes, which explained the aching feet and legs.

After a light lunch, Pat and I went out to buy our Christmas tree, and then I decided to see if I could clear the rest of the logs. In some considerable pain – and to my own amazement – I managed this, finishing just as the last useful daylight faded away. I am writing this as a way of forcing myself to sit down and recuperate! There is still a dinner to cook – fried salmon tail fillets, with either new potatoes or jackets and probably with frozen peas.

So, all in all I am managing to get through quite a lot of activity now. I'm still wearing the AMS over the neoprene support and using a crutch to help the left ankle, and I expect to continue like this for as long as I can tolerate the condition of the joint. I know Mr Milner will want to get his hands on it when I see him in January, but I really cannot see how we will manage the recuperation, because Pat is in substantially more pain than she was for the six weeks after the recent op. In fact, I am managing the stairs much better than she can, though I think she can probably tolerate more walking than I can. After a fusion I will be non-weightbearing for six weeks as before, but with another six in plaster. I need to get in some serious crutch-walking practice before this will be anything like workable, because I cannot see her managing to get a wheelchair in and out of the car as she did before.

### **Thursday 11 December 2014**

This has been another pretty demanding day.

First I had to get all our Christmas decorations down from the garage loft. They are in about ten boxes which are stored conveniently on the edge of the loft opening. Retrieving them involves leaning my long extending ladder against the edge of the opening so that the boxes will be on my left as I go up. Once collected, I have to descend until I can put the box on top of the adjacent chest freezer. This is repeated

until I can't fit any more boxes on the freezer, at which point I have to go all the way down and move each box either onto my Workmate at the other end of the garage or else out and straight into the conservatory where Pat is waiting eagerly.

Given the state of my left ankle and right knee, the ladder isn't exactly my favourite thing, and by the time all the boxes were safe in the conservatory I was in considerable pain.

At some point I took a container of egg-whites out of the fridge and made a batch of French meringue using the new KitchenAid Artisan mixer. What a doddle compared with the worn-out old Kenwood – quick, quiet and smooth. I ended up making two batches using about 20 whites. It's a good thing the Roux brothers' patisserie book gives volume and weight equivalents for whites, making it very easy to calculate the quantities of caster and icing sugar for any quantity of egg-whites. By tea-time the kitchen was stacked high with small individual meringues and flat rounds to be used as pavlova bases. We tried a small meringue each with our dessert of warmed-up rice pudding and cream – light as a feather and very crisp.

Then there was the tree to get into place. I don't know how a six-foot tree managed to weigh so much – I would guess at between 25 and 30 pounds. With the tree still in its net (this year's nets must be economy jobs, made from incredibly fine nylon or whatever other fibre it is – it is a bit like very strong spider-web), I had to drill a hole in the centre of the saw-cut at the bottom to engage with the spike in our cast-iron tree stand. Then there was the puzzle of how to engage the hole with the spike, neither being visible or even really accessible to a probing finger – the solution was random fiddling until, as if by magic, the two components came together. Then the three long screws had to be tightened until the tree stood up before being adjusted minutely to get it standing vertically. Finally, the heavy tree and its cast-iron stand, which must weigh at least another ten pounds, had to be lifted onto the sitting-room window sill.

Except that our window recess wasn't high enough, so after some careful measuring about a foot and a half had to be cut off. Once the tree was in place Pat then had to do some surgery with the severed tip to give the fairy somewhere to sit!

Oh yes in amongst all this I was hot-smoking a piece of salmon for our Sunday tea and present exchange party. Except that I didn't have enough meths for the smoker, so I had to dive up to our 'local' ironmonger's shop – actually in the main village. Then I remembered that we were short of milk so I had to call in at the Co-op *en route*.

Also in amongst this was half an hour or so of brass polishing.

By the time the tree was up and the fish was smoked, I was very glad to sit down at the PC and buy some Amazon gift cards. Anything to take the weight off my aching legs and feet.

I'm sure there was another demanding task buried somewhere in the morning's schedule, but I honestly can't remember what it was.

Anyway, after a good sit down the legs felt a lot better. However, as odd jobs cropped up – putting the lights on the tree and on the garland that winds its way up the spiral staircase, not to mention cooking spaghetti with Dolmio bolognese sauce, mushrooms and diced ham – they began to get more and more achy.

## **Friday 12 December 2014**

My sore legs, ankles and back had not recovered completely from yesterday's toils by the time I got up, but I felt able to get down to some more work. Every year we swear that we are never going to do so much Christmas preparation – and every year we do! It seems that once you have started it is impossible to stop.

Today's first task was to take all the empty and part-empty cartons back into the garage and return them to the loft. This involved a good few climbs up and down the ladder, as did searching for a box to which Pat was *certain* she hadn't had access and which contained some of her favourite decorations. Having already got the other boxes arranged nicely on the edge of the hatch, I then had to explore on both sides of them to make sure I hadn't missed one. I hadn't.

In pursuit of the missing items, I actually climbed right up into the loft for the first time since the operation, which I suppose is some sort of landmark.

All this took us through to coffee time and then to Pat's 11:20am doctor's appointment, which is giving me a chance to rest my already weary legs and update this diary. Then there were more lights to put up.

Later I found two-way socket boxes which would fit in a space in our kitchen. It had keyhole slots for screws so I could mount it on the end of one of the cupboards. The mains lead would need changing for a longer one, so I would need to remove the cover, and the first box proved to have really weird screws like three-pointed stars. Fortunately, the second had proper pro-drive screws. The job was difficult because I wanted to mount the box just below an overhanging cupboard. The light was atrocious, but eventually I managed to get two screws to engage with the keyholes.

I was working in a standing position for quite a time, but I only noticed how badly my legs and feet felt after I had solved all the problems. They have taken quite a hammering over the past few days, and there won't be any let-up until after Sunday, when we have family coming to tea. After that, the run-up to Christmas itself should be a bit less of a strain.

Anyway, the house is looking fairly festive now, despite the absence of some much-loved trimmings (as my Yorkshire wife calls the decorations). Tomorrow will be all about getting the family presents wrapped, and shopping and preparing as much as possible for high tea on Sunday.

### **Saturday 13 December 2014**

Today now (7pm) all seems a bit hazy. I went to the Co-op for some last-minute shopping late this morning and this afternoon I did as much preparation as possible for tomorrow while Pat got all the present ready for the handover.

I used the wonderful KitchenAid Artisan to whip 600ml of double cream, which it did effortlessly and controllably. Then I made a dish of Marie Rose Sauce to go with the salmon I hot-smoked on Thursday. Then I tried out our small food-processor – one I bought because it has a grown-up glass-goblet blender – to chop up a pack of Pilgrim's Choice cheddar for sandwiches it did very well, despite the rather sticky consistency of the cheese. Then I peeled the hard-boiled eggs which I had over-cooked while touring the garden with our friendly tree specialist. They were much easier to peel than usual and smelled very sulphurous but, once chopped – also in the small processor – mixed with mayonnaise and seasoned, they tasted fine.

That was all I could do in the way of prep.

By this time Pat had finished the presents and was deeply embroiled in baking for tomorrow.

I had a read until it was time for our 'coward's dinner' – a couple of bowls of Pat's leek and potato soup and a slab of focaccia – which was all we had the energy for.

The plan was to record *Inspector Montalbano*, which we always do anyway, and watch last week's episode much earlier from the disc, but she worked on through the early part of the evening, and when she stopped it was almost time for the live

broadcast! We started the recording at about 8:45pm, but it soon became clear that we weren't going to last the full 90 minutes, and by 9:45 we were in bed.

### **Monday 15 December 2014**

Yesterday went really well. We managed to get all the food ready before everyone arrived, in spite of an extended visit for coffee from stepson Aidan and his wife and dog, and the fact that Pat was feeling very under-the-weather. This did have a plus she spent far more time sitting with the guests than she usually does, so we didn't get into the wars because of my nagging. As usual, my younger step-granddaughter Josie stole the show!

By the time everyone had left and we had cleared up, though, we were both totally exhausted and aching all over, and I could hardly walk on the left ankle.

Amazingly, though, I felt a lot better this morning. With the neoprene support and the AMS on, the ankle felt really good, so I decided to deliver some more of John Mann MP's Christmas cards (Pat thought I had really lost my marbles). I walked 2.11km in 54 minutes and got home feeling none the worse. The trick was to plan the walk for the minimum time on adversely-cambered pavements, and it obviously worked.

This was by far the furthest I have walked since the surgery.

Only a dozen cards left to send which, if I walk all the way, will be a repeat of today's outing but with fewer letterboxes to find. If I had realised how the houses at the far end of our road are arranged, I could have got rid of those today.

After coffee I started making the first batch of home-made yogurt since the surgery. Things really are getting back to (nearly) normal.

The rest of the day was taken up with endless little fiddly jobs unworthy of description.

### **Tuesday 16 December 2014**

This morning I finished off the delivery of John Mann's cards. As I had quite a lot of shopping to do, I drove the car up to the last of the run of target houses, walked up to the start and did the deliveries in about 15 minutes. It was very satisfying, and a huge relief, to see the back of these cards, because at one point I had been fairly sure I would have to ring up our MP's office and give up the task.

Then off on the rounds.

First stop Aldi for wines and beers. Then to Sainsbury's for bottles of Southern Comfort and Jack Daniel's for stepsons Alistair and Aidan, together with exciting things like Persil and Comfort. Finally to Asda to replenish my stock of Costa ground coffee at their amazing price of two bags for a fiver. Then home for much-needed coffee.

After lunch (actually we skipped lunch, so after *lunchtime*) I took our overflowing crate of empties to the bottle bank (which was also overflowing in spite of Christmas not having arrived yet!) and then went straight to the factory shop in the next village for gift bags, candles and crackers.

The ankle is feeling pretty reasonable today, even after all this shopping and stuff. I hesitate to tempt fate, but I really do think it is getting stronger. I do the flexing and rotating exercises unfailingly every morning before I get out of bed, as well as the knee flex-and-extend ones, all with 16 repeats. I'm not doing any of the other exercises at the moment, which may be a mistake.

I put the neoprene support on over my sock before getting dressed, only adding the Andy Murray Special when I am about to start using the foot seriously.

Pat keeps telling me that I should contact Mr Milner and get booked in for the fusion, but I am taking Claire's advice seriously she did say that I wouldn't do any damage by delaying the surgery. I think that the long rehabilitation would put far too much strain on Pat, so I intend to hang in there. I see Mr Milner in five weeks, so we'll see what the next x-rays look like and what he advises.

### **Monday 22 December 2014**

The lack of daily additions to this diary will suggest that nothing much is happening – and this is true. Things have stabilised pretty well and any changes are now pretty minimal. I will, of course, record any dramatic developments (positive *or* negative), but otherwise I intend to concentrate on enjoying my seventy-second (I think) Christmas.

Season's greetings to anyone who has continued to follow the saga!

### **Thursday 1 January 2015**

And a happy New Year to any persevering readers.

They say that no news is good news, and in the case of this diary that is true. I have got through the whole festive season with no real problems from either ankle. The one that was operated on in September is strong, if not completely comfortable, and the longer-term problem with the left ankle seems to be responding to my plan of exercise and support by becoming steadily stronger and less painful. I haven't done much distance walking but I have been on my feet an awful lot, what with several supermarket trips and many hours in the kitchen. Christmas Day was my real triumph, producing the whole turkey-and-trimmings dinner single-handed, which entailed about five hours without a real break..

Today is New Year's Day, and I need to get into a settled routine now that the foolishness of Christmas is over.

Establishing a regular walking routine must be near the top of the list. Now that I have *MyTracks* to record my walks, I am equipped to maintain a sensible regime of gradually increasing distances and average speeds. I intend to start a five-days-a-week programme, trying to get back to the distance I was walking before everything went belly-up.

I have abandoned my mobilising and strengthening exercises for the duration of Christmas, and I need to get back to these too.

My appointment with Mr Milner on the 19 January will provide a useful deadline for getting the train back on the rails.

One single plus-point stands out. When lighting and tending the woodburner I have always had great difficulty getting from sitting on the floor to standing, with most of the strain on the dodgy right knee, and this seems to be getting steadily stronger.

### **Monday 5 January 2015**

Today is the first day of the new walking regime. I woke up at 7:10am and did the usual round of in-bed exercises for the ankles, knees and back. By the time I had dressed, washed, used the loo, made a pot of tea and taken a cup up to Pat, a pink dawn was showing. I decided to put the mountain boots on with no splint or other support, and after finding one of my emergency contact cards I managed to leave the house at 7:50am.

I took an elbow crutch with me, but only for emergencies. I find that walking with the crutch makes my lower back very sore, and anyway I want to try to walk as naturally as possible.

I had decided to work towards my old Hodsock Lane route, and hoped to do a 2km round trip, but the downhill stretch approaching the lane was rather hard going so I turned round at the start of the lane. When I got home *MyTracks* showed a disappointing 1.31km. The average moving speed was 3.26km/h compared with 4.41km/h for my last walk in July. The good news, though, was that the crutch-tip never touched the ground and the ankle felt reasonably comfortable.

However, that was not to last. We had decided to bring Twelfth Night forward a day and clear all the Christmas clutter today. That meant climbing the ladder to get the dozen or so boxes down from the garage loft – not too bad as most of the contents were missing – and then repeating the climbs to get them back up again in their loaded state.

By the end of the day the ankle felt badly bruised, and I was really glad to slide it down between cool sheets.

## **Tuesday 6 January 2015**

The ankle felt fine this morning, but once again it was destined to take a battering. Today is the day when the builder is coming to repair the water-damaged joist (at the insurance company's expense, thank goodness!). So I was up before 7:30am and, after the usual bathroom routine and a quick cup of tea I had to rearrange our bedroom, moving out heavy bedside cabinets and our far heavier beds with all their electrics, taking down the 'drapes' I had stapled over the hole where Alistair had removed the plasterboard and covering everything with dustsheets. I also had to move everything we had stacked so tidily in the corner of the study/bedroom (formerly the office) so Mick the Builder could get at the joist from below as well as from above.

Like a idiot, I dived into these tasks without first putting on the splint. So, as Builder Mick goes shopping for the bits he needs, I am now wearing the splint *and* the neoprene support together for the first time in several weeks, and the ankle feels fairly safe and comfortable.

Once the bedroom is back together – later today, I sincerely hope! - I will be able to rest the painful bits.

Of course, this has interrupted the barely-begun walking schedule. Today will have to be one of the two 'rest days' for this week, with Saturday a walking day and Sunday as the other rest day, and I really need to go out again tomorrow.

After yesterday's walk I have decided not to use the Hodsock Lane route for a while. I will stay on the level, using the nearby roads and footpaths to build up the distance gradually. The plan will be to find a route between 1.5 and 2km long and to walk this four times before increasing the distance a little for the next five walks.

It is now 3:40pm. I put the bedroom back together before lunch, after which the left ankle was almost screaming, dozed in the chair and then took upstairs and put away a mountain of my clothes, freshly ironed by Pat. I have taken off the support and the splint, and the ankle is still quite painful. I am about to put the kettle on and try to persuade Pat to stop ironing and relax – probably a futile exercise.

Looking back, the ankle has been given an awful lot to do over the past few days, and although it has become very sore when stressed it has recovered fairly quickly.

## **Thursday 8 January 2015**

I did a level walk yesterday morning, using the paved footpaths around where we live to give me a circular route – except that it actually traces a near-perfect rectangle. I wore the mountain boots with two pairs of socks but no ankle support. The ankle was still a little sore from the previous day's antics, but I managed quite well.



*MyTracks* told me the distance covered was only 1.24km, 70 metres shorter than the previous route. The moving time was 23 minutes and the average moving speed 3.24km/h.

The route offers two short spurs that can be added to increase the distance by – at a guess – 600m. I will try that tomorrow.

The rest of the day was taken up mostly by paperwork and phone-calls, so I got plenty of rest.

The schedule has got badly disrupted by domestic pressures. I decided not to walk this morning as we have to go to Buxton for grandson Tom's fourth birthday. So I think what I will do is walk on alternate mornings for a week and then switch to five out of every seven days as previously planned. I will also increase the distance to at least 2km.

It is now only 11 days until I see Mr Milner again in Derby. I certainly don't think I will be tempted to take the surgical option yet.

On the same day I start the annual review for my NHS Free Health Check. This will be interesting, because the surgery has made me a lot fatter than I was, and the consequent bladder problems have also been a little worrying. I hope that I am still holding Type 2 Diabetes at bay, but I wonder whether my erratic peeing pattern and the stinging I often experience when peeing might be down to sugar in my urine. We'll see...

### **Friday 9 January 2015**

I wasn't able to walk first-thing this morning but I went out at about 12:30pm. As planned, I added the two spurs mentioned yesterday, which gave me a total distance of 1.79km, which I did in 41 minutes giving a moving average speed of 3.58km/h – faster than the previous two walks in spite of the extra distance. The ankle was moderately painful but quite bearable, and it calmed down very quickly after the walk.

I still need to add about 200m to get myself up to the 2km target.

Incidentally, some of the figures for today were slightly distorted because I forgot to stop *MyTracks* before taking my boots off and going out to fill the log bag!

### **Monday 12 January 2015**

I managed to get past the 2km mark yesterday, not by adding the spurs I tried on Friday but by extending the walk to a more-or-less perfect rectangle. This took me 36 minutes, covering 2.13km – 0.34km further than Sunday in 5 minutes less time. The statistics may have got slightly confused by a short detour to the paper shop on the way home!

Again, the ankle was moderately painful during the walk, but it soon calmed down once I got the boots off and rested it a bit.

I am going to stick to walking on alternate days for a while before building back up to five days out of seven. If I keep to walking for just over half an hour that will get me back to the recommended minimum weekly total.

### **Wednesday 21 January 2015**

The good intentions lasted for only a couple of walks, thanks first to icy pavements and then, yesterday, to light snow. I am not prepared to risk walking in slippery conditions with one untreated ankle and another just recently mended!

I did 2.2km on the 13 January and 2.3 on the 15 January, and I will start again as soon as conditions are safe. I have decided to stop using the footpaths and try sticking to the streets, where the cambers on the pavements might be a little more

consistent. The obvious route will be quite a bit longer than the ones I have walked so far.

There has been nothing much to report until this week, which explains the lack of entries for nine days.

On Monday 19 January, two days ago, I had my first review following the surgery on the right ankle. To my surprise the left one was not scheduled for attention (I had written some notes in preparation for an invitation to have it operated on!) only the right one was x-rayed. The young doctor who saw me examined the x-rays and had a cursory look at the foot, asking me to flex and extend the ankle, and passed it as satisfactory.

I was afraid that. By refusing immediate surgery, I might have discharged myself in respect of the left ankle, but when I asked about this I was assured that it would still be looked at again if I had any concerns – Claire even reminded me that I have her mobile number!

So if nothing dramatic happens I will be seen again in six months.

Meanwhile, I have been very stiff, so I have resumed the usual routine of neck, shoulder and back exercises as well as continuing the ankle and knee routine before I get up every morning. I also did ten stand-sits this morning while waiting for Pat to appear for breakfast.

Here are the notes I wrote on the morning before the hospital appointment

*The left ankle has recovered well after taking a battering while serving as 'the good ankle' during recovery from the right-ankle surgery. Initially, after weight-bearing was allowed on the right ankle, the left was very painful and needed support from a right crutch. During December I delivered Christmas cards for our MP, covering the whole of our road in several batches using the crutch. On the 5 January I started more energetic walking on alternate mornings, building up to 2.3km and not needing the crutch at all (though I carry it as a precaution). Some of the walks were in trainers with the Active Ankle splint but most in walking boots without extra support. Icy pavements have interrupted this routine in the last few days.*

*Generally, if I have a really busy day, the left ankle is quite painful, but it recovers quickly with rest. I did a great deal of supermarket shopping before Christmas and managed without much difficulty.*

*Driving has been no problem. The left ankle is still a little painful when using the clutch, but is improving all the time. I have done several round trips from home to Buxton – 50 miles each way – since starting to drive again.*

*In view of this I don't feel much urgency, and there are other factors to consider.*

*Most seriously, I put on a lot of weight and became very unfit after the right-ankle surgery, to the extent that I have trouble and get breathless tying shoelaces. I think another spell of six weeks without weight-bearing on the left foot before I get myself fitter and lose some weight would be quite dangerous.*

*I also need to get the right leg fully operational so that I can use crutches rather than a wheelchair, so that I get some useful exercise during recovery.*

*The right ankle feels strong now but there are still niggling pains when it is fatigued or when I have to stand still for long periods.*

*There is also the issue of the right knee, which has been giving quite a lot of trouble for a year or two. I have been concentrating on building up strength*

*by using it fully when going up and down stairs. I still need to pull quite hard with my hands when climbing and lean quite hard on them when going down, but the knee is definitely becoming stronger. I would like to get back to normal functioning if possible.*

## **Thursday 22 January 2015**

It wasn't a walking morning today, though almost all the snow had melted, so I made do with a very full routine of exercises after my first cup of tea.

I hadn't done my usual in-bed routine so I adapted this to be done on my lovely leather recliner 16 ankle flex-and-extend, 16 ankle half-rotate, 16 knee flex-and-extend and 16 knee-locking for a count of 4.

The neck exercises are turns to left and right, flex and extend, tilts to left and right, forward dips with roll to left and right (10 repeats each).

The shoulder exercises are stretch upwards with both arms, stretch forwards with both arms, stretch across and back, crunch shoulder-blades together, roll shoulders forwards with arms down, roll shoulders backwards with arms down, windmill arms across chest inwards and outwards (10 repeats each).

The lower back exercises are kneel and dip forehead to floor as close to knees as possible, still kneeling with hands on the floor arch and extend the spine, press-ups to arch back keeping pelvis on floor, sit with legs straight out and reach for ankles, lie on back with knees bent and press lumbar spine to floor, in the same position lift bottom as high as possible (10 repeats each).

Finally, keeping the same position as previously with legs locked together, roll legs to one side and head to the other then reverse (20 repeats).

To this I added 10 stand-sits using a dining chair and 10 lifts to tip-toes while leaning hands on the wall for balance only.

Now, four hours later, almost everything feels better for the work-out. I am walking far more naturally and comfortably, but the left shoulder and arm are aching a little.

## **Monday 9 February 2015**

I seem to have lost track of things a bit lately, getting on with normal life but not walking and only exercising intermittently (apart from the early morning ankle and knee workouts, which I do every day).

So this morning I decided to get off my butt. I got up just after 7am, put on the big boots with a neoprene support between the two pairs of socks on the right foot and went out to try a new route. This turned out to be slightly shorter than the recent ones, but was entirely on pavements rather than in the back alleys. In theory this would have given me easier surfaces to walk on, but the pavements were just as rough as the footpaths.

I covered 1.95km in 33.35 minutes, giving me an average moving speed of 3.54km/h and – now that I have found out how to tell *MyTracks* my body weight – burning 154kcal. The average speed was among the fastest I have scored so far.

After a few minutes' rest the left ankle was quite comfortable, but after carrying the vacuum-cleaner upstairs, making the beds and vaccing the tick, soft bedroom carpet, cleaning out the wood stove and vacuuming part of downstairs it was much less happy.

I intend to try doing five walks this week.

## Tuesday 10 February 2015

I woke this morning to a world of freezing fog, and was sorely tempted to abandon yesterday's good intentions straight away. However, by the time I had dressed and had a cup of tea I had convinced myself that I must at least *try* walking in these conditions.

So on went the boots, a sweat-shirt and a fleece and out I went.

My main concern was slippery pavements, but they turned out to be fine. So, carrying a stick but not using it I set off on my planned longer route, all on pavements rather than footpaths.

The left leg was feeling a little weak and achey but the ankle itself was not too bad, so I stuck to the long route. It seemed to go on forever in the dull, grey light, but eventually I got back home. *MyTracks* showed that I had walked 2.58km in 42 minutes 47 seconds (out of a total time of 43minutes 54 seconds, which means I was only stationary – presumably while starting and stopping the clock – for 67 seconds), giving an average moving speed of 3.61km/h.

This is the longest walk I have done since before the operation.

At 4pm the legs felt a little weary but were pain-free and working fine. Later in the evening I was stricken with a nasty bout of restless-leg syndrome which was only relieved when I fell asleep for about half of *24 Hours in Police Custody*.

## Wednesday 11 February 2015

I slept well but woke before 6:30am, when the heating came on and the bin men could be heard emptying the blue recycling bins. Towards 7am I did my ankle and leg exercises and then relaxed for a few minutes before getting up at around 7:15am.

The plan was to do another 2km-plus walk and then to go into Worksop for the market, though only for a flying visit as Pat would be going out with a friend at around 9:30am and we wanted someone indoors to accept an important parcel.

I decided to walk down as far as the village post office and then see if I felt able to go further. The legs turned out to be wearier than I expected, so I turned round at the post office and slogged home. *MyTracks* showed that I had walked 1.55km in 29 minutes – an average speed of 3.19km/h compared with the previous day's 3.61km/h. I was disappointed to have done only a kilometre and a half, but there was still the market to come.

I left home before 9am. When I started *MyTracks* in the town-centre car park something odd happened. It started recoding my movement but didn't show a map. However, when I got back to the car with a Valentine card from M&S and my fish from Darren the fishmonger, I found that the map had been added. I had walked another 0.98km (most of it either uphill or down) in 22 minutes, giving an average moving speed of just 2.67km/h), but this included some time spent buying the card, shuffling from one end of Darren's stall and back and pausing to look at a few others.

So the morning's total walking was 2.5km in 51 minutes, compared with yesterday's 2.58km in 43.54 minutes. The two days' calorie count was 380.

The legs are feeling reasonable as I write just before midday. I hope they recover enough to allow me to do decent distances and times tomorrow and on Friday.

## Friday 13 February 2015

I don't know why, but yesterday's walk was really difficult. I had decided to be a bit gentle with myself, so I did only 1.5km in 27 minutes. The legs felt quite battered by the time I got home and were fairly stiff and painful for the rest of the day.

I totalled up the time and distance for the first four days of the week at 8.6km in 160 minutes. This was well over the Government target of half an hour per day for five days a week, so I decided to do no more than half an hour today. I did the same route and yesterday but in the opposite direction, clocking 1.77km in 31 minutes 30 seconds and bringing the week's total up to 10.4km in 192 minutes.

The Government target would be 150 minutes, so I was well over this for my first serious week's walking.

My legs felt even worse than they did yesterday, both during and after today's walk. It is now 3:45pm and they feel reasonable – but I am really looking forward to my two rest days!

## Monday 16 February 2015

I managed a fairly lazy weekend, and by this morning the legs were feeling much better – though still a little battered by last week's excesses. I think I got a bit over-ambitious for my first full week, aiming for at least 2km a day, so I reduced the target to 30 minutes a day. The plan will be to aim for 30-minute walks with steadily increasing distance as I get fitter.

I had been getting increasingly unhappy with the mountain boots, so I decided to try walking in the newest Reebok workout shoes, with the AMS splint, today.

Resisting the temptation offered by the first fairly heavy rain for weeks – it would have been too easy just to say 'Too wet for walking!' - I put on my cagoule and set out on the same route as Friday, aiming to walk for just 30 minutes. In spite of the rain I was quite comfortable, and the trainers definitely made walking easier than in the heavy boots.

I stopped the clock at 29 minutes 43 seconds, with a total distance of 1.82km, an average moving speed of 3.68km/h and a calorie count of 137.

The legs and feet definitely felt more comfortable than after last week's walks.

I have just compiled an *Excel* sheet to handle all the *MyTracks* data. This will be imported into this document after every update and will be on the page following the end of this text. Straight away this has revealed that today's average moving speed of 3.68km/h beats the previous high of 3.61km/h. It must be the change of footwear!

Using *Word*, because it seems to handle the *Excel* import better than *Writer*, I managed to get the table looking pretty smart. I had expected to edit the data in the spreadsheet and import it every time, which would have been pretty tedious as that needs updating more-or-less every day, but it turns out that I can edit the *Word* table directly, inserting rows and typing in the new data as necessary. You learn something new every day...

## Tuesday 17 February 2015

It is 8:25am and I am just back from my walk. I added an extra loop at the halfway point but still got home 1½ minutes short of the 30-minute target, so I did half the additional loop I added yesterday. The left ankle was a little painful in the trainer with the splint, but not enough to hinder my walking.

My total moving time of 30 minutes 51 seconds was just over a minute longer than yesterday's, the distance was 70m longer, I burned two more calories, my maximum speed was 0.68km/h slower and my moving average speed was exactly the same at 3.68km/h.

I haven't said anything much about my walking targets. I try to walk as quickly as I can, with the longest stride and highest pace-rate I can manage. I also try to avoid

any stops at all this morning I actually walked a little further when crossing the road so as to go behind a passing car rather than waiting for it to pass.

Obviously, at 72 and after a long period of inactivity following the ankle surgery, my speed is nowhere near what it was before the left ankle began to fail, but as my *MyTracks* stats show it isn't too bad and is improving. The average for all the walks I have recorded since mid-November is an average moving speed per walk of 3.39km/h, and I have just clocked 3.68km/h for two successive 30-minute walks in trainers.

I do not get out of breath on these walks, but I am usually sweating when I stop, even when the temperature is around freezing.

### **Wednesday 18 February 2015**

This morning I did the same route as yesterday, though I was slower and didn't need to add the extra loop at the end.

My legs felt very tight and stiff, and the left ankle was quite tender, but I managed to get round – though after Monday's and yesterday's average speed of 3.68km/h I dropped to 3.56km/h. (There is no need for me to include the full statistics here as they are available in the table below.)

I went straight in the shower between the walk and breakfast, after which I went to the market. I was weary enough to decide to use the car-park halfway up the town, but even so I found the slight hill up to Darren's fish stall a little taxing. The payback was that it was easier going back down.

I was probably paying the price of yesterday's antics in the garden, when I dug up a very deeply rooted rose bush from my late son Dave's garden and re-planted it in a more open and sunny location. The roots took a lot of shifting and required a very deep hole for re-planting.

It is 3:30pm now, and the legs don't feel too bad. I think I will manage my five walks this week, though earlier I had serious doubts!

### **Thursday 19 February 2015**

I decided to try the walk in my old Reeboks today as they had been a lot more comfortable than the newer ones during yesterday. To my surprise they were quite a lot more comfortable – surprise because some time ago I had decided that the worn-down heels were really bad for my walking.

I did the same route this morning as for the rest of the week, without the extra loop at the end. The full statistics are in the table below but the key points are that I walked for over 30 minutes without a pause and that my average moving speed was back up to 3.68km/h – the same as Monday and Tuesday. The legs were far more comfortable than yesterday and the left ankle was only mildly painful. The AMS splint was a lot more comfortable than with the newer shoes.

### **Friday 20 February 2015**

With the AMS strapped a little tighter than usual the left ankle was fairly painless for the whole walk, which was on the same route as yesterday but in the opposite direction. Unsurprisingly the average moving speed of 3.5km/h was the slowest of the week, but was still faster than three of the days last week.

On the spreadsheet I averaged the average moving speeds (if you see what I mean!) for each of these two full weeks. Last week came out at 3.44km/h and this week at 3.62km/h, so in spite of feeling pretty weary I have actually walked significantly faster this week than last. I need to focus on stats like this to keep up the motivation.

After breakfast I did the full set of neck, shoulder and back exercises, which I haven't done for some time. I have been feeling very stiff lately, with all sorts of aches and pains, enough to make me walk awkwardly. As I write this (at a little after midday) I realise how much better I feel, and how much more easily I am moving, for just one workout.

It really is stupid for someone my age and with all my dodgy joints to give in to laziness. I have started to get into a rhythm with the morning walks – no matter how reluctant I feel at 7:15am! - and am seeing progress after just two weeks. I need to observe the same discipline with the bones.

It is now really well established scientifically that even a small amount of exercise works wonders for health and longevity – even far less than the recommended 30 minutes a day minimum which I kept up for several years before the left ankle gave in and am trying to maintain now. There is no doubt in my mind that my years of walking brought me back from the borderline for Type 2 Diabetes. I had my annual blood glucose test yesterday and I am hoping that the months of relative inactivity after the surgery haven't undone the good work.

### **Tuesday 24 February 2015**

The second walk of the third week was completed this morning. I am still walking in the old Reeboks with the AMS splint and this morning I found myself outside the front door without the walking stick. I decided not to go back for it, as I haven't used it at all since I started the serious walk programme. The walk – a different route today – involved one short and fairly steep climb and one longer but gentle one, which may explain the statistics.

I have just tidied the wood shed and feel no worse for either that or the walk.

On Saturday we went to Retford for the Farmers' Market, and it was not until we got there that I realised I had forgotten to put the splint on. I managed quite well in spite of this.

Then on Sunday we went to Barney's small birthday do, which involved – among other antics – walking sideways down their incredibly steep driveway (only in Sheffield, folks!) carrying the precious birthday cake.

Yesterday I made a batch of my sourdough focaccias without any difficulty. I realise that I am spending far more time on my feet these days.

Overall, I am aware that I am still very stiff and I am walking fairly slowly – Pat keeps pulling ahead of me, which is a bad sign. I am getting up and down the stairs on alternate legs, provided I have a good grip with my hands. The right knee works reasonably well and is rather sore, but this is a big improvement.

### **Thursday 26 February 2015**

Yesterday's walk – the reverse of Tuesday's route – was quite slow (average moving speed 3.51km/h) and uncomfortable. However, later in the morning we went shopping and I suddenly found that my legs felt much looser and my stride-length seemed to have increased – very odd, especially considering that I was wearing the slightly suspect newer Reeboks. The left ankle remained quite comfortable for the rest of the day.

This morning I reverted to my more regular route, and things still felt really good. The stride length still seemed longer and I kept up a good pace rate as well, arriving home five minutes before the 30-minute target so that I had to add a short loop before stopping. My moving average speed was 3.89km/h, the fastest since I started the five-walks-a-week programme by 0.14km/h. I am writing this an hour and a quarter after I got back and everything feels fine.

It's strange that I can go from a slow and uncomfortable walk one day to a far faster (by 0.38km/h) and more comfortable one in 24 hours.

I just hope tomorrow is as good so that I can finish Week Three on a high. I think I'll do the same route as today for a good comparison.

I have been looking for the 'other' ankle support given to me by the split workshop at the Royal Derby. I couldn't recall seeing it since I moved back upstairs from the single bed in the office. It turned out to be tucked away in the drawer in the upstairs bedroom.

The support is like a sock with an open toe and heel, except that the piece round the ankle itself is open at the front and closed with velcro, allowing a measure of adjustability. Once this is on, a strong elastic strap attached under the instep is wrapped around the foot and ankle like a figure-of-eight bandage and fastened with velcro, again offering some adjustment.

I tried it (I think) on the right foot before the September operation and found it very painful to wear, but I have had it on for around an hour so far today and it feels pretty good. How it compares with the Andy Murray Special remains to be seen, but I may try it on tomorrow's walk – the last of Week Three, to be followed by two rest days!

I am very encouraged that the left ankle, which Mr Milner had scheduled for urgent surgery is, with a little help from the supports, becoming more and more usable. It took a serious pounding while I could not weight-bear on the right foot after surgery, but it is far less painful now and doesn't feel weak.

To put this in perspective, my morning walks over the last three weeks have clocked up total of just over 26km in almost 7½ hours, and that is only on the programmed walks. I have done plenty of 'ordinary' walking as well, including visits to Worksop and Retford markets and shopping around Tickhill, not to mention many laps round a large Sainsbury's and a medium-sized Co-op.

I still don't feel fully mobile, in the sense that I don't think I could cope with a city break involving miles trudging round streets and shops, but I feel well on the way.

So three cheers for Claire Stevens who, on the 4 July last year, reassured me that I was unlikely to do extra damage just by using the left ankle, encouraging me to postpone the fusion operation and arranging for the provision of not one but two ankle supports.

The soft support was very comfortable. I decided to take it off at about 5:15pm and the ankle felt fine.

### **Friday 27 February 2015**

The week has ended on a high note. This morning's walk was quite enjoyable, with the legs moving quite freely and very little pain from the ankle. I was consciously stretching my stride and pushing myself, though I was getting weary towards the end.

I had not looked at my watch when I set out on a route which had sometimes taken me a full 30 minutes, so I was quite surprised to find that I had completed it in 27½ minutes. I was even more surprised to see that the moving average speed was 4.05km/h, 0.11km/h than yesterday's high and the first over 4.

This was followed by a trip to nearby Tickhill, which involved quite a bit of walking. I had tried using the soft support, and the ankle didn't do too badly, despite the adverse cambers of almost all the pavements we walked on.

I am writing this at 3pm and the legs and feet are feeling good.



My spreadsheet tells me that, in the last three weeks, I have walked just over 28km and have walked for a total of 7 hours 48 minutes, and the net effect has undoubtedly been beneficial as my performance has improved considerably.

### **Monday 2 March 2015**

We had a busy weekend, needing to move a lot of stuff around as Alistair and his wife Julie painted our bedroom and the study – not to mention keeping young Ewan and Tom occupied and out of their parents' way!

So plenty of work for the legs on what should have been my two rest days.

This morning I decided to try going back to the walk-route I used for years prior to the surgery. It involves descending quite a steep little hill and coming back up another one. I didn't have any particular problems and clocked 1.98km in 32 minutes, with a moving average speed of 3.68km/h. That is faster than three of the last week's five walks and 0.47km/h slower than last week's fastest on Friday.

The rest of today has been dedicated to putting the study (formerly the office) back together and starting the mammoth task of clearing ten years' accumulation of waste paper out of the filing cabinet. So – no rest for the wicked (or his dodgy ankle)...

### **Tuesday 3 March 2015**

I did the same walk this morning, producing some really weird stats.

I got a little further before the stopwatch hit 16min 30sec. I did the round trip in 34min 41sec, with a moving time of 33min 46 sec – the big difference was due to difficulty crossing roads and someone who chose to pass me in a Volvo right where the path had big puddles so I had to stop and wait.

The good news is that I cracked the 2km barrier with 2.07 – 90 metres further than yesterday. The really weird bit is that my average speed was 3.59km/h against 3.58km/h yesterday – and my moving average was *exactly* the same as yesterday at 3.68km/h!

### **Wednesday 4 March 2015**

I intend sticking to the same route as Monday and Tuesday at least for this week but probably permanently, as it is the one I used for years and much of it is on a country lane among fields rather than through suburbia.

This morning's walk felt a little harder than yesterday's especially the second half, but to my amazement it scored better. I walked for a slightly shorter time (00:33:40 against 00:33:46) and further (2.15km against 2.07), burned more calories (159 against 156), recorded a higher maximum speed (5.32km/h against 4.57), and scored a higher moving average speed (3.83km/h against 3.68). The total time and overall average speed are distorted because I forgot to hit the *MyTracks* stop-button when I got home.

It is encouraging that, even when the walk feels hard and painful, I am actually improving my performance quite steadily.

After breakfast I went in town to do some shopping. I didn't bother to record the trip, and although I did record a previous one I must have deleted it from the phone as well as from the spreadsheet and the table below, which I did to make the five-day programme look tidier. There is a lesson there never throw data away – you may want it again for some unanticipated purpose! Luckily some of the information is in this text, so I know that I did almost exactly one kilometre (I have now copied what there is back into the spreadsheet – lesson learnt!). This morning I carried on past Darren's fish stall to a fruit-and-veg stall which must have been at least 50 metres further on – possibly as much as 100 metres. So my total today is between 2.6 and

2.7km. I took the markey walk at a gentler pace than the morning walk, but it all adds up.

I must be doing something right, because this morning, unprompted, Pat remarked that my 'tummy is going down'. I fear that this is due more to improved muscle tone than to lost weight, but either way the big fat belly that developed during the post-op period is shrinking.

### **Thursday 5 March 2015**

The legs felt a little less comfortable on this morning's walk, and this is reflected in the statistics. I walked for 27 seconds longer but covered 60 metres less distance and burned 8 less calories (I am actually beginning to wonder what the margin of error is in *MyTracks* because the figures don't seem to make complete sense). My fastest speed was 4.42km/h – 0.9km/h slower than yesterday's. And my moving average speed was 0.15km/h slower than yesterday's but, at 3.68km/h exactly the same as Monday's *and* Tuesday's. Three days in one week with exactly the same average speed how likely is that?

The drop in performance from yesterday isn't surprising, given that I did the extra kilometre or so in the market.

It will be interesting to get some analysis from the spreadsheet for the first four weeks, once tomorrow's walk had been logged.

After breakfast I did a full 10-repeat set of neck, shoulders and back exercises because I have been getting very stiff, with odd pains popping up all over the place. The oddest one affects the left-hand edge of my lower jaw and the end of my left thumb, coming and going as if the two have a direct neural link. I've found quite a lot of people asking about this on web forums, so I am not alone, but nobody has come up with a definite answer. Easing the neck seems to help sometimes but not others, and it seems to happen more when I am in bed than when I am moving around.

In the past few days I have had blood tests for diabetes and prostate cancer. The first is a routine annual check which I have had ever since I was diagnosed as borderline for Type 2. The second was because I thought I had a urinary infection and week or so ago but the test came up clear. I know I have an enlarged prostate and hope the PSA test will be OK.

### **Friday 6 March 2015**

After a laboured walk yesterday, this morning's felt really good – a faster pace-rate and a longer stride. This was confirmed at the 16½-minute mark, when I estimated that I had got at least a couple of hundred metres further than yesterday, and by the *MyTracks* stats when I got home.

There was a nasty moment when the phone refused to wake up on the doorstep, but it got its act together after a few random button-pushes and told me that today's was the second longest after the Tuesday of week one (distance 2.31km) and the second fastest after last Friday (moving average speed 4km/h). This is a really satisfying climax to the first four weeks of the full programme.

Thanks to the phone's dodgy moment, *MyTracks* recorded a very long total time of 00:39:28 against a moving time of 0:03:436!

So that is my first four weeks' walking completed without a break and with only one wet one. I have walked a total of 38.74km in a total time of 10 hours 36 minutes, all but four of the 20 walks topping the 30-minute target, with an average time of 31.8 minutes. Week 4 has the longest distance and the longest walking time.

The aim now must be to better those results.

I am very satisfied that I have got out of bed at almost exactly 7:15am every single walking day and had no trouble motivating myself to get out and do the walk.

I am also delighted that the left ankle is standing up to the pressure very well, vindicating my decision to defer surgery. I am looking forward to thanking Claire (again) for her support in this.

### **Monday 9 March 2015**

On Saturday we went to Retford market, where I had a fairly leisurely walk round, buying vegetables and a dressed crab from Whitby, while Pat did her shopping.

On Sunday I did nothing more energetic than stroll across to the shop for the paper, some bread and some milk. So my rest days were both reasonably restful.

I felt good straight away as I left the house this morning, and set a brisk pace-rate. Unfortunately I forgot to set the stop-watch, so I had to guess at my 16½ minute timing. I could remember roughly where I had turned round on Friday, so I made sure I kept going after that point. I cut it a little fine *MyTracks* recorded the walk at just 50 metres more than Friday's and the moving time as 12 seconds *less* than Friday's.

I was beginning to flag a bit by the time I got to within sight of home but I put on a push and recorded a distance of 2.36km and a moving average speed of 4.12km/h – my longest and fastest since I started using *MyTracks*.

The temperature was just above zero when I set out, and by the time I reached home I was sweating freely and had unzipped my fleece, so I had obviously pumped my metabolic rate up significantly. I want to keep this level of exertion up.

The walk I have now settled on is the one I did for several years before the surgery – or, at least, part of it. There is a gate where Hodsock Lane goes from nice smooth tarmac to rough grass and stones, and I remember being fairly pleased with myself when I was doing the round trip in 30 minutes. That is the walk that pulled me back from the borderline for Type 2 Diabetes, and I would like to build back up to that again.

I looked at the maps in *MyTracks* and I couldn't manage to locate the end of the tarmac, but my trusty OS map shows the lane going from solid lines to dotted ones. If this is accurate, I am currently turning round only a few hundred metres before the gate. It is tempting to have a crack at the full distance, but it might be more sensible to build up in 100-metre increments. Then, once I am doing the full distance, the aim would be to build the speed up steadily.

The left ankle is a real mystery. Sometimes it is weak and tender and at other times, like this morning, it stays fairly pain-free and allows me to walk more and more quickly.

### **Tuesday 10 March 2015**

I remembered the stopwatch this morning, and decided to walk to the same marker as yesterday – the field gate. This took me 17 minutes 40 seconds.

I wasn't as comfortable as yesterday – particularly on the way home – but still managed to maintain a decent pace. I got home in 36 minutes flat, so I was just a fraction slower than on the way out – hardly surprising as there is more ascent on the way home.

I diverted by a few metres on the way out to post a letter, so the distance walked was 2.40km against yesterday's 2.36. I hit a higher top speed than yesterday – the third fastest at 5.13km/h. The moving average speed was 4.00km/h, slower than yesterday, the same as last Friday and third fastest since I started the current programme.

Much of the rest of the day was spent on a long-overdue tidy of the garage. The bones and muscles stood up pretty well to this and to improvising a repair on my Mum's old AEG vacuum cleaner, which we use in our bedroom and which hasn't been sucking well for a while. The problem turned out to be a worn or missing seal between the vacuum tube and the cleanser, which I have sorted out with a long rubber band. Time for a rest...

### **Wednesday 11 March 2015**

I have decided to walk either for 16½ minutes or to the field gate, whichever is the furthest, hoping that the time will eventually take me past the gate.

Today, in spite of weary legs after yesterday's exertions, I made the gate in 17 minutes 20 seconds – 20 seconds faster than yesterday. The recorded distance was 2.42km (20 metres longer than yesterday thanks to minor variations due to traffic). The top speed was much lower at 4.12km/h but the moving average was higher at 4.11km/h, only 0.01 slower than Monday's record. So a walk that felt slow was actually all-time second best in terms of distance and speed!

The Wednesday walk is always an event – I am 'over the hump' with only two more before the rest days.

This was a shopping day – the market, followed by Aldi, Sainsbury's and probably the farm shop. We started by parking in Worksop town centre and visiting Marks & Spencer (which, we have recently discovered, has by far the best selection of reasonably-priced greetings cards in town) and Wilkinsons, which are close to the car-park. Then we set out on the long uphill trek to Darren's fish stall, carrying on a little further to get bananas from one of the two fruit-and-veg stalls. By the time we got back to the car I was very glad to sit down. And even more so after we had done a lap of Aldi. And yet more after a similar lap of Sainsbury's.

I don't know whether it was my newest Reebok trainers, but by the time we had unloaded the car at home my feet were almost literally killing me! The underside of my right foot – the one that was operated on in September – was very sore and the left ankle was protesting loudly. Ten minutes in stockinged-feet with a cup of coffee worked wonders, though, and I spent the rest of the day in my beat-up older Reeboks – the ones I am now using for the morning walks. Maybe the newer ones just need breaking in.

### **Thursday 12 March 2015**

Walking felt very slow and generally painful this morning – perhaps the result of yesterday's shopping on top of a good walk.

I think *MyTracks* must have got a bit confused this morning, because the statistics don't quite make sense. To begin with, it didn't calculate any calories, but the rest of the figures don't seem to make real sense either. The total moving time is much more than for other recent walks at 37:08, which certainly chimes with how I felt; the top speed is higher than yesterday at 4.60km/h, which is a real surprise; and the average moving speed is 3.85km/h against yesterday's 4.11. That is the first sub-4.0 figure since last Thursday but still seems surprisingly high considering how I felt.

Apart from going into town for an optician's appointment at 3:40pm I had a reasonably relaxed day. On the way to Boots, with a few minutes to spare, I decided to have a look at the Iceland shop. They have been advertising some very appetising meat on TV lately, including the ostrich of which we are very fond. Sadly this doesn't appear to have reached Worksop yet!

Interestingly, though, I decided to go out of the rear exit, which has a few shallow steps leading up to it. It was only when I got to the top that I realised I had walked up these quite normally, with one hand just resting lightly on the handrail.

## Friday 13 March 2015

The end of the fifth week of the programme. For some reason *MyTracks* decided that my maximum speed was an insane 7.86km/h today. I have no recollection of running (joke!) so this must be a computing error, but the rest of the stats make sense.

After heavy rain overnight, my usual route along Hodsock Lane had a huge puddle extending right across it, so I decided to carry on along the minor country road and turn round at the 16½-minute mark. There was a convenient driveway entrance a little further on so I decided to carry on to that for easy repeatability and turned at just on 17 minutes.

The walk back was quite hard, with tired knees and a sore left ankle, but the distance was 2.30km, just slightly less than the rest of the week, and my moving time was 35 minutes 51 seconds, the second shortest of the week. Ignoring the insane maximum speed, the moving average speed was a respectable 3.84km/h – a figure I didn't match at all in the first two weeks and only once in the third.

In these first five weeks, I have walked a total of 50km in a total time of 10 hours 37 minutes.

## Monday 16 March 2015

I had a fairly easy weekend, with the main focus being the Australian Grand Prix. I did decide to walk up the road for the Sunday paper without the splint, wearing the old Reeboks, and this was fairly painless. I also got up early to prepare some wonderful Dexter beef – a kilo of shin and a 550g cheek – for a long slow braise. Once that was done, I decided to walk up the road for the Sunday paper without the splint, wearing the old Reeboks, and this was fairly painless. In fact, the left ankle has felt quite strong throughout the weekend and this morning.

Today's walk was very comfortable.

I have had slight problems with the technology, though. I set the stopwatch as I moved off, reaching the field gate in 17 minutes and 50 seconds. At the end of the walk the watch showed 35 minutes 44 seconds – almost exactly the same time for the out-leg and the in-leg.

*MyTracks* didn't agree with the watch showing a total time of 38 minutes 33 seconds and a total moving time (which is what I measured with the watch) of 36 minutes and 1 second. How it decided that I had stood still for 2 minutes and 32 seconds I don't know there is the delay waiting for it to capture the GPS signal and a few losses of the odd few seconds getting across the roads, so maybe that is right. The moving average is the same as last Tuesday, fractionally slower than last Monday and Wednesday and slightly faster than last Thursday and Friday, so not a bad speed.

## Tuesday 17 March 2015

A slightly quicker walk than yesterday and, if anything, a little more comfortable it actually felt as if I was walking far more quickly than yesterday – which I was, reaching the field gate in 17 minutes dead on the stopwatch and getting back in just a few seconds longer. The 55 seconds extra on the moving time must be because I didn't stop the recording until I had got into the house and taken off my fleece and sweat-shirt. The GPS must have managed to follow me indoors!

*MyTracks* clocked the distance as 100 metres longer than yesterday at 2.50km, and the moving average speed at 4.07km/h compared with yesterday's 4.00.

I am now making a batch of focaccia using commercial yeast rather than my usual sourdough because Pat doesn't like the sourdough flavour. Apart from the yeast I stuck to my usual recipe with a slowly-fermented starter and then a sponge fermented overnight. It will be interesting to taste the difference.

While the focaccias were proving I went out and delivered some of John Mann's first batch of election leaflets – maybe as many as a quarter of my allocation. John was on TV yesterday, having unearthed some new evidence about the ever-growing scandal of child sexual abuse in high places. He really is a star, and I'm proud to have him as my MP and to make at least a small contribution to his campaign.

Both ankles were a little sore by the time I got home, but nothing I could not handle.

### **Wednesday 18 March 2015**

The legs felt weary this morning, with the left ankle still a little sore. I got to the field gate in 17 minutes 55seconds by the stopwatch, giving me a target time for home of 35:50. The unforgiving stopwatch showed 36:55 when I got home, so the walk back was a minute and five seconds slower than the out lap.

*MyTracks* gave me a moving time of 37:32, a distance of 2.38km, a top speed of 4.49km/h and a moving average speed of 3.81km/h. Last week, the first three days had moving averages over 4km/h but this week it is only the first two.

The way the ankle was feeling by about 10am, I was beginning to wonder if I should do my leafleting *instead* of the morning walk rather than *after* it. I decided that I probably should, and by 11am I had decided that I definitely will. Looking back at the early *MyTracks* records, I see that the third and longest of my three outings delivering John Mann's Christmas cards covered almost the whole length of our aptly named street, Long Lane, clocking 2.11km. If I can do the whole of the street in one go that will be a perfectly respectable addition to my portfolio of walks. At the time of that walk, I was still using one crutch, so it isn't surprising that the moving average speed was a miserable 2.34km/h. It will be interesting to see what I can score now that I am walking so much better.

It is clear that doing the leafleting yesterday after a pretty good walk was a pretty bad idea and that going to the market today after a not-so-good walk would be another bad one. We have fish in the freezer, so I settled for driving down to Asda to top up the coffee and banana stocks (they have an irresistible deal on Costa ground coffee and sell Fyffes' bananas, which really do seem to be the best, as Pat believes) and to the nearby farm shop for some other fruit and veg.

### **Thursday 19 March 2015**

For some not altogether rational reason, I decided not to start stuffing people's letter-boxes very early in the morning, so I treated myself to a lie-in, getting up at 8:15am rather than 7:15am. I don't think I slept at all during that hour. But just lazing there was very agreeable.

I set out at just after 9:30am, as soon as I had finished my after-breakfast cup of tea, burdened with a very heavy shopping bag containing 190 of John Mann MP's glossy leaflets, less however many I had delivered on Tuesday (probably about 30). First I had to walk up the road to where I stopped on Tuesday, which gave me a short power-walk. The *MyTracks* map shows this as slightly less than a quarter of the distance from home to where Long Lane becomes a muddy track, the trace showing quite clearly the transition from a more-or-less straight line to the densely-packed zig-zag in and out of people's drives (mostly on our side) and front paths (mostly on the other side).

The statistics stick out like a sore thumb on the spreadsheet and th table below. I was out for almost exactly an hour and a half, clocking 1 hour 18 minutes of moving time – the gap is probably due to all the fiddly, awkward letter-boxes I had to wrestle with, including far too many at ankle level. The distance covered was 3.58km, exactly 1km further than my previous record - the second walk of the first week of the strict programme, when I was testing different routes. Unsurprisingly, considering the

zigging and zagging, the speed is on the low side a moving average of 2.73km/h compared with my fastest of 4.12km/h. The indicated maximum speed of 6.69km/h must be another anomaly in *MyTracks*. The calorie count is a massive 287.

By the time I got home my legs were on the verge of collapse and I could hardly bear to put my weight on my feet. However, two cups of strong coffee and a sit-down later things were working more-or-less normally, and I was able to start making my first batch of yogurt since November – I think I've been using my 'disability' as an excuse for buying the lovely Leo Valley product!.

There are only just over 40 houses left to leaflet, on both sides of the road between here and the main A60 Doncaster road. I will treat myself to another lie-in and do these tomorrow morning, with a little 'free' walking to make up any deficit from my usual target time of about 33 minutes.

### **Friday 20 March 2015**

Another delightful lie-in this morning. After breakfast I got set up to observe the solar eclipse, with a white tile and a piece of card with a small hole in the centre. It was a beautiful sunny morning, but just as the eclipse began the cloud came in! So I abandoned this and took the last of John Mann's leaflets out, getting them all delivered in 31 minutes – not long, but enough to keep up my target of at least half an hour's exercise on each of the five working days.

I was struggling by the time I got home. Both feet were sore and the left ankle was really protesting. But it was a real relief to know that I had finally got all the leaflets delivered. I think there will be another batch closer to the election, and although it will be hard I am confident that I will be able to deal with it.

To add insult to injury, *MyTracks* had got itself in a twist again, only recording about a third of the distance covered. I have put what I hope are intelligently-estimated values on the spreadsheet and in the table below so that the weekly analysis will make reasonable sense.

I have just watched two recorded *Horizon* programmes while resting the legs and feet, which are now much more comfortable. However, I think I have earned a fairly lazy day – and maybe weekend!

### **Monday 23 March 2015**

Saturday was fairly relaxed and Sunday morning too, but Pat decided to do some gardening after lunch. Not to be outdone, I got our 19-inch Atco rotary mower with its Briggs & Stratton engine out and left it in the sun to dry out for a couple of hours. Then, after lunch, I put the mountain boots on and got it started for the first time since Autumn after only about five pulls. Then I gave the very tussocky lawn a good seeing-to. The mower is self-propelled, but turning it and doing the odd corners require manual control, so by the time I had finished I was pretty tired and the legs – particularly the wretched left ankle – were protesting pretty loudly.

I got up half an hour earlier than usual this morning as the car was being collected by the garage at around 9:30am. I did the usual walk, reaching the field gate in 17 minutes and 45 seconds and reaching home in 35 minutes 55 seconds. To my intense annoyance, *MyTracks* had bombed again, forgetting the last quarter of the walk, and when I went to the local post office before lunch it did the same again, in spite of my having deleted quite a few of the earlier tracks in case the app's storage was getting a bit clogged. I think I may have to uninstall and reinstall the app, but as a slightly less drastic first step I have returned as many as possible of the settings I have changed after giving the phone a full reset by removing and replacing the battery. We'll see how things go tomorrow, making sure that the stop-watch is activated as backup.

For the main walk I wore a ProSport support, one of the two I ordered on Ebay several months ago, expecting the familiar neoprene ones. These turned out to be quite puny-looking white fabric jobs, but they are actually pretty good. I used the AMS as well, because I was still feeling the effects of my mowing session. When I went to the post office I left the AMS off and the ankle felt reasonably comfortable.

### **Tuesday 24 March 2015**

I used both ProSport and Active Ankle (AMS) supports again this morning. According to the stop-watch I got to the field gate in 17 minutes 35 seconds – 10 seconds faster than yesterday – but was slower coming back at 36 minutes 5 seconds so 10 seconds slower overall. This is remarkably consistent, considering that the legs felt tired and achy and were actually a bit wobbly, with some steps a little out of control.

To my relief, *MyTracks* had settled down and recorded the whole walk. I clocked 2.35km in a total moving time of 32 minutes 59 seconds, burning 142 calories. My maximum speed was 4.41km/h and my average moving speed was 4.28km/h, amazingly the fastest recorded since I started the serious walking in mid-November. Not bad for dodgy legs. This may explain why the legs are dodgy even if it doesn't feel like it, I am pushing them to the limit.

I have the house to myself for most of today, and nothing very taxing planned. I will probably do a neck/shoulder/back workout, something I haven't done for quite a while.

### **Wednesday 25 March 2015**

Today the stopwatch showed 17 minutes 25 seconds on the out lap but a disappointing 35 minutes 18 seconds for the full distance. Both figures are better than yesterday's, confirming my impression of walking faster and more comfortably, but I had hoped to get back in a time nearer to 34 minutes 50 seconds.

According to *MyTracks* the total moving time was 00:32:44, top speed was 4.36km/s and moving average speed was a new high (by a tiny margin of 0.04km/s) of 4.32km/s.

We did quite a lot of wandering around Worksop market later this morning and by the time we got home I was in quite a lot of pain. I am beginning to wonder if all this exercise is doing me good – or harm! Maybe I should allow myself a week off from the programme. But then I am already going to get a break because we are going over to France for a week on the 7 April. It will be interesting to see how I cope with wandering about when I *haven't* done an early-morning 'power-walk'...

In the afternoon I brought the bin in, took two big bags of bottles to the bottle-bank and paid a quick visit to the Co-op for some odd bits of shopping. This was all done without distress, the legs and ankle having staged their usual fairly brisk recovery.

### **Thursday 26 March 2015**

I thought it was going to be raining enough this morning to justify taking a rest day, but when I got up at the usual time the rain had stopped. However, it was a cagoule morning rather than a fleece morning, with a temperature around 5°C. It was drizzling slightly, but not enough to cause problems.

The steps seemed to be flowing well as I set off. The big puddle was right across the lane but shallow enough to negotiate without filling my trainers, and I made the field gate in a new record of 17 minutes 15 seconds – another ten off the time. That is three days in succession when I have reached the gate more quickly than on the previous day. Again I tried hard to get home in the same time but the legs began to protest over the last few hundred metres and I was disappointed to see the watch



stop at 34 minutes and 59 seconds – 29 seconds slower on the in lap than on the out lap.

*MyTracks*'s version of the story was quite different moving time 32minutes 1 second, maximum speed 4.50Km/h and another record moving average of 4.40km/s, so steady progress maintained. Significantly – as far as I am concerned – this is the first week in which four consecutive moving average speeds have consistently increased – Tuesday faster than Monday, Wednesday faster than Tuesday and Thursday faster than Wednesday. If I can raise the figure again tomorrow I will be a very happy chap!

We went over to brother-in-law Anton's this morning and did a bit of tidying in his front garden. I didn't bother with an ankle support and feel none the worse for that.

## Friday 27 March 2015

A really good fifth walk of the week this morning, but some highly questionable statistics from *MyTracks*. So, to begin with the reliable data, the stopwatch showed a very gratifying time to the field gate of 16 minutes 40 seconds – an improvement of 35 seconds on yesterday's time. I was conscious of maintaining a brisk pace-rate and have started paying attention to my breathing, but this is a spectacular result after a hard week. Again, I tried to match the out-lap time on the in lap, and again failed pretty dismally, getting home in 33 minutes 48 seconds as opposed to the target of 33 minutes 20 seconds compared with yesterday's 34 minutes 59 seconds..

*MyTracks* shows a total time of 34 minutes 33 seconds, which is reasonably close to the stopwatch time, allowing for the time spent waiting for the GPS signal before I start the watch and the shorter delay between stopping the watch and stopping *MyTracks*. However, it shows a ludicrous moving time of 25 minutes 27 seconds, in spite of showing the complete route on the map and the correct distance of 2.3km. The calories show as 100 compared with to usual 140-150, and from then on things get pretty barmy a maximum speed of 5.41km/h, an overall average speed of 3.99km/h and, absurdly, 5.41km/h for the average moving speed.

All this is clearly barmy, but as I have the correct distance and the stopwatch timings I can calculate the average moving speed as 4.08km/h, but this is slower than yesterday's 4.40km/h. As my total time on the stopwatch was 1 minute 59 seconds faster than yesterday, I have to conclude that it is the *MyTracks* data and calculations which are wrong.

There followed some fun and games with *Excel*, trying to write a function that would calculate the average speed represented by the distance and the time walked. I decided to use an arbitrary distance of 2.50km as I am walking the same route every day. I eventually worked out that the number of hours represented by a value using the hhmmss format could be calculated like this

$$\text{HOUR(I48)}+(\text{MINUTE(I48)}/60)+(\text{SECOND(I48)}/3600)$$

That is the number of whole hours plus the number of whole minutes divided by 60 plus the number of whole second divided by 3600 – the 'divided by' bit being a fraction of an hour. Turning the whole thing into a fraction of an hour was easy – just stick a 'one over' in front

$$1/(\text{HOUR(I48)}+(\text{MINUTE(I48)}/60)+(\text{SECOND(I48)}/3600))$$

Then multiply the result by the arbitrary distance with the complete *Excel* function

$$=2.5*(1/(\text{HOUR(I48)}+(\text{MINUTE(I48)}/60)+(\text{SECOND(I48)}/3600)))$$

Anyone reading this will see that I am no mathematician, but no matter pasting that function into the sheet has given me a set of five average speeds for this week the first when I have bothered to record the stopwatch timing for the whole walk in this diary.

Here are the new values (with the *MyTracks* ones in brackets, from Monday to Friday

4.18 (4.00), 4.16 (4.28), 4.25 (4.32), 4.29 (4.40), 4.44 (4.08)

So apart from a little hiccup between Monday and Tuesday, that is a steady increase through the week. I am now tossing up whether to stick to this and just bin *MyTracks* or to find and road-test another app. There will be a slight complication because today's out lap was only ten seconds short of the magic 16½ minutes. Once I pass this – which could be as soon as next week based on today's performance – I will need to increase the distance walked, so I will need a GPS facility of some sort to find out the distance to my next marker after the field gate. If I can't find a better app than *MyTracks* I may just use this for distance measurement and stick to the stopwatch and *Excel* for recording performance.

I think the plan should be, once I am consistently passing the field gate in under 16½ minutes, to choose a clear new mark which takes close to 17½ minutes to reach, and try to work that down to 16½.

This afternoon we went into flattest North Lincolnshire to buy beef from the Axholme Dexter Beef farm. A really pleasant chat with the proprietor, whom we normally see at Retford Farmers' Market. And a heavy and expensive load of beautiful beef – burgers, a rib roast for Easter, more cheeks and stewing steak like we had a couple of weeks ago, plus a bag of bones for the stock pot.

On the way back we stopped off at The Original Factory Shop – me for a £3 kitchen timer and Pat for some skin-care stuff. I ended up spending £81! But I have a new pair of HiTech walking shoes which feel really comfortable and which I will road-test on Monday.

Tomorrow should be fairly restful as we're visiting stepson Alistair and his family in Buxton – so plenty of driving but not much walking. And Sunday is a Formula One day, so that should keep me glued to The Box.

### **Monday 30 March 2015**

This morning had a very unusual routine get up at 6:45am; do the usual ablutions; then have breakfast; take the car to Retford for 8am for its service; return home in courtesy car; have a cup of tea; and do the usual walk.

*MyTracks* returned gibberish, consistently with recent performance 35 minutes 43 seconds overall with a moving time of 21 minutes 57 seconds – I don't know what it thought I had been doing for the remaining 14 minutes or so!

So I have reached a decision I will carry on using the app and recording what it gives me on the spreadsheet, but I will stop updating the table below. I will report daily the out- and in-lap times and the resulting average speed, using the typical distance of 2.35km every day until I increase it.

Today I reached the field gate in 16 minutes 53 seconds and got home in 34 minutes 38 seconds, giving an average speed of 4.33km/h. That is faster than all last week's speeds except Fridays (4.44km/h).

### **Tuesday 31 March 2015**

Last night was wild. The house was buffeted by gale-force winds that were still with us when I got up. There had also been quite a lot of heavy rain, which meant that the lane was flooded. So I took the same modified route as on Friday 13 March, turning when I hit 17 minutes as before. The previous time *MyTracks* had clocked the distance at 3.3km so I decided to accept this, the app having returned yet another highly eccentric set of stats, as this would give me a good comparison.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> I got round in 35 minutes 41 seconds, giving an average speed of 3.84km/h. Today, in spite of a horrendous head wind most of the way home, I did the route in 34 minutes 31 seconds, giving an average (using my magic new *Excel* function) of 4.00km/h.

I have a new problem with the technology the reset button on my Casio watch is jammed, meaning that this morning I had to run the watch to a nice round figure and then subtract this from the final time. I am going to try carefully washing round the button and then applying a little WD-40.

### **Wednesday 1 April 2015**

The lane was *just* passable this morning, so I reverted to my normal route, reaching the field gate in 17 minutes 48 seconds and home again in 35 minutes 48 seconds by the stopwatch. This gives an average speed of 4km/h, faster than Monday but slower than yesterday. *MyTracks* continues to return rubbish, which I have dutifully recorded on the spreadsheet but am not bothering with here!

After breakfast I went into town to do some shopping, returning with a loudly-complaining left ankle. The rest of the morning was spent on various administrative jobs, all on the computer so the ankle recovered fairly quickly.

This afternoon I was on my feet for a long time making a double batch of my favourite ex-sister-in-law's delicious lemon curd while Pat made meringue. The two will be married together to make a posh dessert for our Easter dinner on Saturday, when I will be roasting my first joint of Axholme Dexter beef – a lovely pair of ribs. That is now cooling in the fridge, and I just hope it sets firmly enough!

The next task is to put back two fence panels dislodged by the gales, but this will have to wait until the said gales die down or I will be sailing round the garden...

### **Thursday 2 April 2015**

A good walk this morning – but a bit of a technological catastrophe! Because, as I am sure I have already mentioned, the stopwatch reset button on my Casio watch is not working, I decided to use a recently-purchased kitchen timer instead. Luckily, in spite of its eccentric behaviour, I did activate the *MyTracks* app on my phone.

When I got to the field gate I took the timer out of my pocket to see it showing just over six minutes – for a walk that normally takes me over 17 minutes. Obviously the start/stop button had had an accidental nudge. I turned for home and when I reached the house I stopped *MyTracks* before carrying on to the local shop for milk. Before setting out, I had noticed the time at a little after 7:40am, so I noted the time elapsed until I passed the house. So I had two possible timings to look at.

As I have come to expect, *MyTracks* produced some totally silly stats, but the total time of 34 minutes 31 seconds did coincide very well with my estimate, so I decided to accept this. The distance was also fine at 2.34km, but the rest of the figures were nonsense Calories 35, maximum speed 7.34km/h (I wish!), overall average speed 4.07km/h (probably not far wrong) and moving average speed 7.34km/h as well! Crazy.

Anyway, I settled for 34 minutes 31 seconds and the distance of 2.5km I have been using in my new *Excel* function. This gave me a moving average speed of 4.35km/h, the highest this week but lower than last Friday's 4.44km/h, so a credible figure.

As mentioned, for the second time in two days I had to carry on to the shop for milk, so the actual distance for yesterday and today was about ten minutes longer than the basic morning walk.

In spite of starting out with a rather sore left ankle, my pace length and rate had both seemed fairly high and I had settled into a good rhythm, needing to breathe quite hard and ending up with what the locals call 'a dab on', meaning a good sweat.

After breakfast I got some more exercises, reinstalling two fence panels dislodged by the recent gales (mentioned yesterday), which have finally subsided. This involved some fairly strenuous work on uneven ground, lifting the 6ft-square panels from place to place and moving some seriously heavy concrete paving slabs.

So, all in all, a pretty physical morning.

Tomorrow's walk will be the last for a while as we are going to France for a week next Tuesday. It will be interesting to see how the muscles and joints settle down while excused from serious exercise.

### **Friday 3 April 2015**

This morning the left ankle was rather weak and painful, but not bad enough to stop me walking. This, after all, would be the last walk of the eighth week – 40 walks without a single default. I think I would have crawled round this one to complete the set!

I tried the better kitchen timer this morning but it, too, found life in my jacket pocket a bit challenging. It gave me a credible reading of 17 minutes 20 seconds at the field gate but had somehow switched from timer to clock mode on the way back. Cleverly, though, the clock had accepted the timer's 17 minutes 40seconds, set itself to 00:17:40 and carried on ticking the seconds away.

As if this wasn't amazing enough, *MyTracks* had also recorded a completely credible set of stats total time 00:36:51, moving time 00:35:19, distance 2.36km, maximum speed 4.24km/h, overall average speed 3.84km/h and moving average speed 4km/h. The magic *Excel* function returned 4.01km/h.

So that is it for a while. We leave for France next Tuesday 7 April, and I think I can treat myself to Easter Monday off, so the walking will begin again on Monday 20 April, unless I feel so deprived that I am impelled to start on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Wednesday 16 April 2015**

The trip to France was a real success for me. First because I have got my bottle back, facing the challenge and coping perfectly well. It is funny how one can lose and then regain confidence.

The driving has all been particularly reassuring. Last Tuesday I drove from home north of Worksop to Maidstone services on the M20 without a break. Yesterday I drove from Dover to Cambridge services on the A14, also without a break, having driven from Orbec in Lower Normandy to a service station just this side of Boulogne with only a pee-break. I had no discomfort whatever from my back or legs and only mild twinges from the left ankle when using the clutch. This is a tribute as much as anything to the nine-year-old Ford Focus we bought two years ago. The same journey in the Audi A6 Quattro AllRoad we part-exchanged (original cost about £45,000) would have had my sciatic nerves howling within an hour of setting out. The Focus seats look very ordinary but are amazingly comfortable, for me at least.

This morning I finished unloading the car and sorted a lot of stuff out before Pat surfaced, and by lunchtime we had pretty well everything back to normal. Then, to my own amazement, immediately before lunch, I dragged our Atco Admiral mower out of the shed and cut the grass!

I am going to rest the legs for the remainder of the week and start the walks again next Monday.

It turned out that the malfunctioning reset button on my Casio, which prevented me from zeroing the stopwatch, also prevented me from changing the home city from London to Paris, so I spent almost the entire week wearing a watch that was an hour slow. Then, last Saturday, we went to Lisieux's amazing market. I headed for a watch stall, and found a pretty presentable black plastic digital watch with reasonable facilities for ten Euros. That is currently about £7.30 sterling! This came with a tiny instruction 'booklet' – actually about 35cm by 4.5cm – which I found almost totally unreadable. So I have spent part of this afternoon scanning each 'page' and producing the 'large-print-for-the-visually-impaired' version on four sheets of A4. This has enabled me to set the time fairly precisely and even, eventually, to change from 12-hour to 24-hour format (by accident, this last, as I could not find out how to do it).

The stopwatch facility is simple to use and the display is much larger and clearer than the tiny window on the analogue Casio dial, so I will be wearing this watch for walks even after the Casio has been mended.

However, I had forgotten how much harder to use digital watches are than analogue ones. You can glance at an analogue watch like my Casio, even under quite difficult lighting conditions (and against other obstacles like me not having my glasses on!), and read the time easily. The digital watch needs clear vision and good lighting. Thus making sense of the wonderful Douglas Adams's definition of a backward planet as one where people still think digital watches are a pretty cool idea.

### **Tuesday 21 April 2015**

The first walk yesterday went better than I had expected after a two-week break. I reached the field gate in 16 minutes 17 seconds and home again in 33 minutes 38 seconds, giving me an average speed of 4.23km/h.

This morning, wearing my new HiTech walking shoes for the first time, not without some misgivings as they still feel a little strange, I hit the field gate in 16 minutes 12 seconds (5 seconds faster than yesterday) and home in 33 minutes 20 seconds (18 seconds faster than yesterday), giving an average speed of 4.27km/h.

I then spent much of the day pressure-washing our terrace areas, moving the garden furniture from our outbuildings to its summer locations and pressure-washing the chairs. By the end of the day I could barely stand up!

### **Thursday 23 April 2015**

Yesterday's walk demonstrated just what a battering I had given the legs the day before. It took me 18 minutes 10 seconds to reach the field gate and 37 minutes 45 seconds to complete the whole circuit – 4 minutes 20 seconds more than Tuesday – giving an average speed of 3.77km/h..

Not content with the previous day's antics, I went off shopping (though I decided to skip the market) and then loaded up the spray and went weed hunting. The legs felt pretty dire by the end of all this, but nowhere near as bad as the previous evening.

This morning I hit the field gate in 17 minutes 35 seconds and completed the circuit in 36 minutes 34 seconds without too much pain – still slow but but one minute and one second quicker than yesterday – and an average speed of 3.89km/h.

Oddly, *MyTracks* seems to be behaving sensibly this week, but the figures I am giving here are based on the stopwatch and the average of the past few weeks' distances, all of which are from almost exactly the same route – out to the field gate and back again with no significant deviations.

Later in the morning I brought up the rest of the garden furniture and hosed it off, leaving the ankle a bit sore but not too bad. Had an hour with *The Classic Car Show* to rest it!

I spent the rest of the day without the splint and did nothing to stress the ankle, and by bedtime it was feeling fairly good.

### **Friday 24 April 2015**

It still felt unusually good this morning, and the joint seemed to be fairly well aligned.

Once the initial stiffness – which was quite bad for the first few minutes – had worked off, I tried to concentrate on walking as normally as possible, with a fairly long stride and a good pace rate.

I made it to the field gate in 17 minutes 5 seconds, half a minute faster than yesterday, and completed the lap in 35 minutes 3 seconds, a minute and 25 seconds faster than yesterday, which is a pretty dramatic improvement. The ankle was only mildly painful, particularly when I was on adverse cambers, so the recovery after all the stresses of the week seems to have been sustained.

That was walk number five of the first week since the 14-day break and the trip to France. The average speed was 4.06km/h, which has only been beaten five times. And it isn't long since any average over 4km/h was an event! So a slightly rocky week ends on a high.

Two rest days now with nothing too energetic planned...

### **Tuesday 28 April 2015**

Yesterday morning was abnormal because the car had to go to Retford for its MoT. I got up at 6:45am and was fed, watered and out of the house before 7:30am. I planned to do the same as when the car was serviced a few weeks ago and walk later in the morning, but the ankle was rather uncomfortable, probably due to some foolish acrobatics I did with the grandsons in Buxton on Sunday so, as I have been amazingly conscientious for the past nine weeks, I decided to let myself off the hook for once.

By the way, the nine-year-old Focus passed its MoT without even an advisory.

This morning I got up fifteen minutes early, at 7:00am, because I was wide awake. I did the walk in the old Reebok trainers. The legs and ankle felt reasonably comfortable, and I reached the field gate in 16 minutes 57 seconds, but it took me 18 minutes 13 seconds to complete the circuit. This gave me an average speed of 4.04km/h, faster than Wednesday and Thursday last week, slower than most recent scores but within 0.1km/h of the average for the past three weeks.

*MyTracks* didn't record because it got no GPS signal.

Generally, I am doing fairly well physically, with a lot more activity than a few weeks ago. This morning's challenge was to weigh the Calor Patio Gas cylinder on our barbecue to check that we would have enough gas for Pat's birthday bash on Saturday. It was quite a job finding out the empty weight (tare) for the cylinder, as this was not stamped on it. Eventually I found a helpful website and was able – with some complicated wrestling around the bathroom scales! - to ascertain that the 22kg bottle held around 8kg of propane, which should be more than enough.

I am amazed that the left ankle is doing as well as it is, but I have to admit that I am still quite lame and am unlikely to get much better, so I am coming round to the view that I should probably go ahead with the fusion, perhaps in early Autumn if Mr Milner can manage that. My last review was on the 19 January, so I should be called in for around the middle of July.

### **Wednesday 29 April 2015**

I think I may have slept through until about 6am this morning. If I did get up for one or more pees I have not recollection of them.

It was raining quite heavily when I looked out of the *en-suite* window but by the time I was ready to go walking the rain had kindly stopped.

Again, my phone got no GPS signal, so all I have to report is the stopwatch data. (Just before writing this, I switched off GPS, did a restart on the phone, switched GPS back on and checked whether Google Maps could find me. It did, and for the first time ever I got *MyTracks* to start recording with GPS *indoors*.)

My legs didn't feel as good as they did yesterday, so I wasn't very surprised to clock 17 minutes 53 seconds at the field gate (56 seconds longer than yesterday) and 36 minutes 16 seconds (1 minutes 6 seconds longer) at the end of the walk. *Excel* returned an average speed of 3.92km/h (0.12km/h slower than yesterday and one of the slowest speeds over the past three weeks).

Today is shopping day, a heavy one in preparation for the Saturday bash. It could be pretty hard going.

### **Thursday 30 April 2015**

This morning started dry and bright with just a hint of drizzle coming and going.

The ankle felt good this morning – surprising as it was quite painful yesterday afternoon, particularly after sitting for a long time. This is a mystery which I don't think I have mentioned here before. When getting up off a chair I am very careful because I often get quite excruciating pain just where the shin joins the top of the foot. Once vertical, I walk around and the pain quite quickly disappears.

I was on my feet a lot in the garden yesterday, so I wasn't surprised by the pain.

Anyway, I set off at a good pace and reached the field gate in 16 minutes 50 seconds – a whole minute and three seconds faster than yesterday. Walking became steadily more painful as I walked back, and I was very glad to get home in 35 minutes 18 seconds – 58 seconds faster than yesterday.

*MyTracks* picked up its GPS signal while I was sitting at the kitchen table. Our kitchen is a single-storey extension, and the signal was lost as soon as I walked into the main part of the house (a bungalow, but with a higher roof). I got bored with waiting in the driveway for it to come back and just stuffed the phone in my pocket. When I got back *MyTracks* was showing a reasonable record of the walk, so it must have picked up GPS pretty quickly from the pocket. It had my moving time as 35 minutes 57 seconds (39 seconds longer than the stopwatch) and my moving average speed as 3.93km/h against the 4.03km/h calculated by my *Excel* function.

### **Thursday 7 May 2015**

The routine has been badly disrupted by the car MoT, preparation's for Pat's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday bash and our night at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons. Basically, I missed last Friday's walk (party prep) and this Monday's and Tuesday's (going to and coming back from Le Manoir). However, I did manage the act of will that took me out as usual yesterday. It took me a miserable 18 minutes and 15 seconds to get to the field gate, and an even more miserable 37 minutes and 41 seconds to do the round trip. My average speed was 3.77km/h. My note on the spreadsheet entry says 'Slow and painful after party prep, party and treat'.

The legs had been tired, stiff and painful after the party and were still not working very well (except for driving) when we got to Le Manoir. Walking round Raymond Blanc's wonderful veg garden was pretty dire, and even getting to an from the

restaurant was quite an ordeal. Similarly with breakfast on Tuesday, after which the drive home (through countless miles of M1 road-works with a 50mph speed limit) was light relief.

I was pretty uncomfortable yesterday, but felt better this morning. Starting the walk with real enthusiasm. I wore the HiTech walking shoes rather than the old trainers – which are getting literally down-at-heel – and felt that my pace was quite good, with far less discomfort. This was confirmed at the field gate with a time of 17 minutes 35 seconds (50 seconds faster than yesterday) and a home time of 35 minutes 34 seconds (2 minutes and 7 seconds faster than yesterday), with a better average speed of exactly 4km/h.

This is week 11 of the full programme, and only the second week that has been disrupted. Up to week 9 the full five walks were done. Not bad, I think, for a old wreck recovering from surgery!

It seems that walking keeps my legs and ankles limbered up and missing the walks causes them to stiffen up and become more painful very quickly. The routine of five walks and two rest-days a week works really well.

I have just walked round to the 'Civic Centre' to vote – for John Man MP and his three Labour colleagues in the council election – and feel pretty good, physically and politically. We have had a family medical crisis to cope with today, stepson Alistair having been rushed into hospital early this morning, but I feel ready to cope in whatever way is needed. In fact, since I wrote that, Al has phoned from his hospital bed and seems to have pulled through the crisis. All he needs now is some sensible diagnosis!

### **Monday 11 May 2015**

On Friday I improved my times and average speed (16 minutes 54 seconds to the field gate, 34 minutes 28 seconds to home and 4.13km/h. We had a fairly lazy weekend after hospital visits in Stockport and this morning I made a marginal improvement to 16 minutes 50 seconds, 34 minutes 14 seconds and an average of 4.15km/h, the fastest since the 21 April.

### **Tuesday 12 May 2015**

The early-morning routine has become one step more complicated since my much-loved radio-controlled Casio watch came back, sadly non-repairable (apparently because they have thrown away the tools needed to service a watch only seven years old) but still fully operational except for the stopwatch and world time features. Now I have to remember to change into the ultra-cheap digital watch for the walk and back into the Casio when I get back – copying the stopwatch time onto my notepad makes that easy to remember.

This morning's times were very close to yesterday's. They would have been closer if I hadn't had to stop on Hodsock Lane to let a tractor lumber sedately by! The time to the field gate was 17 minutes exactly (10 seconds longer than yesterday) and the round trip took 34 minutes 31 seconds (17 seconds longer than yesterday, which was very good considering a pretty fierce head wind!).

After breakfast I went to the corner shop for milk and started making the new batch of yogurt. This afternoon I will be driving to Stockport and back to visit Alistair, who is still in hospital there. The weather looks good, so I hope to do the round trip in less than four hours...

### **Wednesday 13 May 2015**

As things turned out we didn't go to Stockport Alistair was discharged and Julie was fine about picking him up. So the afternoon was quite lazy.



This morning's walk was uncomfortable. The whole lower left leg felt achey. However, my times were in the same range as for the rest of the week and better than the average for last week. Time at the field gate was 16 minutes 55 seconds - within 5 seconds of the previous two times, and the walk was completed in 34 minutes and 53 seconds, giving an average speed of 4.08km/h, only 0.03km/h slower than the week's best.

I am due to go shopping this morning, and at the moment the idea isn't very attractive!

### **Thursday 14 May 2015**

Yesterday's shopping, after a long shower, was not as uncomfortable as I expected, but – after walking most of the length of the market uphill for bananas and fish, and then downhill to Holland & Barrett and Wilko, where I walked the length of the very large store – I was very relieved to sit down in the car. After a short stop at the local farm shop for fruit and vegetables, I was even more relieved to get home and remove the shoes and splint.

I am finding that I spend much of my days in stockinged feet lately, because this is much more comfortable than wearing any of my shoes. Maybe I should get some flip-flops, which are dead flat and just slightly cushioned...

This morning I was just 3 seconds slower to the field gate than yesterday (16 minutes 58 seconds) but 23 seconds faster to home (34 minutes 30 seconds), giving an average speed of 4.12km/h. If tomorrow goes well, I am on track to do the whole week without any sub-4.0 averages, which would be a first. So what has felt hard and not very fast would actually be my best week yet, with the fastest average since the 24 April and no slow averages. This just shows how important it is to watch the statistics (it's not just me with OCD!) what has felt like a pretty poor week is actually a really good one. I must do some more analysis to see if I can highlight the successes more clearly...

### **Friday 15 May 2015**

All definitely did *not* go well this morning. For a start, the left ankle was pretty uncomfortable from the start. Then I discovered that I had come downstairs in my newest Reeboks instead of the HiTech walking shoes. I really didn't feel like going back upstairs for the second time (I had already taken Pat a cup of tea) so I dug out the old Reeboks – the ones I was using every day for walks until recently.

I set off as usual, having hit the record button on *MyTracks* and the start button on the stopwatch, but by the time I had crossed the road and gone maybe 100 metres I realised that I hadn't picked up a birthday card that Pat wanted posting. Rather than having to walk to the Post Office later, because the ankle was already protesting, I stopped the watch and went back for the card. Then, when I got back across the road after my second start, I realised that I hadn't reset and started the stopwatch. Then there was a brief delay getting through the commuter traffic to and from the postbox.

It took me 18 minutes 28 seconds to reach the field gate – think! I forgot my regular repetitions of the time, so it may have been 17:28 – and 36 minutes and 6 seconds to complete the walk. To my disgust, after yesterday's optimism, *Excel* calculated my average speed as 3.94km/h, so that was the end of my ambition to score no sub-4 averages this week.

Now we come back to what I said yesterday about the importance of keeping an eye on the stats and maybe doing some more analysis. I decided to put an overall average field at the bottom of each week's average speeds, and the one for this week scored 4.08km/h. That turned out to be the highest speed – by a whisker – yet! So, suddenly, I didn't feel as bad about today.

I've mentioned before about the pain in the ankle being concentrated where the shin joins the instep, but I've noticed recently that when it is hurting badly there is a fairly large and very hard swelling across there. I've now discovered that if I massage the swelling really hard it goes down quickly and the pain fades at the same time I've just done this and feel a lot more comfortable. I plan to spend as long as possible in stockinged feet today – and I must track down some flip-flops.

### **Monday 18 May 2015**

The flip-flops I remember from the sixties seem to have vanished, but I did find a pair of modern equivalents at The Original Factory Shop just up the road. The soles are much thicker than the original sandals – 3cm at the heel – but they are almost completely flat. The sandals are also incredibly light – almost weightless. The straps are made from some kind of fabric, as are the toe-posts, which are not very comfortable between my toes at the moment; I hope they will soften up with wear. I am only wearing the sandals to go up and down our cast-iron stairs and when I need to go outside, going barefoot the rest of the time.

We went to Retford Market on Saturday and I was okay walking around the town. However, standing still while Pat chose a few greetings cards in Clintons was hard.

Yesterday we went to see Alistair and the gang in Buxton – a really nice day for all, I think. We didn't get home until about 9:30pm, when it was almost totally dark, but had a really easy drive – which is more than I can say for the outward journey, because the Chatsworth International Horse Trial was on and we joined an almost-stationary tailback at least a couple of miles long back from Baslow village. As far as we could see it could have reached all the way back to Chesterfield! At least we were late enough coming back to miss the people leaving Chatsworth.

This morning's walk, on a cool, breezy and drizzly morning, was another minor landmark. I felt pretty good as I started out and reached the field gate in 16 minutes 48 seconds. I don't know if this is a record, but I may be tempted to add a column to the spreadsheet and recover all the figures from this account. The full walk, though, was definitely another 'fastest since 21/04/2015' at 34 minutes 7 seconds – 1 minute 59 seconds faster than Friday. The legs, and particularly the ankle, were pretty-much pain-free, so in spite of the weather the walk was really enjoyable.

### **Tuesday 19 May 2015**

This morning's walk (in the old Reeboks) was uncannily close to yesterday's (in the new HiTechs) I reached the field gate in 16 minutes 36 seconds (12 seconds faster than yesterday and completed the walk in 34 minutes 5 seconds (only 2 seconds faster than yesterday). The moving average speeds for the two days were identical at 4.17km/h, which seems odd.

There was very little pain, but the left leg did start to tire and wobble a little halfway back.

I spent most of yesterday in bare feet and the left ankle felt all the better for that. The new flip-flops are still a bit harsh between the toes, so I'm not tempted to keep them on when I don't need the protection. I had a fairly lazy day, apart from changing our sheets and pillow-cases and fixing the catch temporarily on the window above the beds. Part of the locking mechanism has disappeared and somehow the remainder had become locked when the handle was in the closed position with the window open, preventing it from closing completely. Once I had figured this out I was able to unlock it with a screwdriver and close the window. This is a fanlight, and the hinges must have lost some of their friction because on very windy days it is forced wide open and the curtains are sucked out. The window is on an east-facing wall and our prevailing south-westerly is obviously causing a bit of a vacuum! Now that I

understand what is going on we can live with the missing locking-bit, but it would be interesting to find out if the two fixing bolts on all similar fittings are in the same positions relative to the lock spindle...

### **Friday 22 May 2015**

I have been a little lax with this diary this week. But I have kept my walking stats up-to-date every day. On Wednesday I got to the field gate in 16 minutes 35 seconds and home again in 33 minutes 56 seconds, the fastest of the week so far. Yesterday I reached the field gate in 16 minutes 40 seconds and home in 34 minutes 31 seconds, both slower. And today the time to the field gate was a poor 17 minutes 9 seconds and home 35 minutes 32 seconds, on legs that felt pretty weary and painful. So I had a good start and then downhill all the way!

To be fair we have had a pretty demanding week with Alistair and Anton, with lots of food prep and cooking, and I have fitted a new handle to the bedroom window. We feel we have earned a lazy weekend, which will be easy with the Monaco Grand Prix (but only highlights, which means avoiding news broadcasts all afternoon on Saturday and Sunday) on BBC TV and the start of the French Open tennis on various ITV channels.

I have just added a 'Field gate' field (ouch!) to the spreadsheet. I was able to do the most recent entries from the notepad on the desk, where I record the times as soon as I get home, but the earlier ones needed a search through this diary. Tedious, but it is all done now.

### **Tuesday 25 May 2015**

We had decided to have a lazy Bank Holiday Monday, and I decided to extend this to the walking programme. The ankle has been fairly sore over the weekend in spite of not being overworked, apart from during a couple of neck/shoulder/back/leg workouts which I felt I needed as my left shoulder had been causing me enough discomfort at night to spoil my sleep. As usual, the exercises produced an immediate improvement.

So today's was the first walk of this week. The ankle was still sore so the walk started rather painfully, but I was able to complete it in a reasonable time – although at the time it felt slow and laboured. I reached the field gate in 17 minutes 26 seconds, just 17 seconds longer than last Friday (though that was the worst day of last week, so this isn't saying a lot!). I was home in 35 minutes 44 seconds, only 12 seconds slower than last Friday. The average speed was 3.98km/h. These times were far better than I expected but leave a need for improvement if I want to maintain my week-by-week progress.

Later in the morning I took a heavy builder's bag of garden refuse to the tip, managing really well (with a little help from one of the tip team). There are still two – possibly three – more to deal with...

### **Wednesday 27 May 2015**

This morning's walk was a considerable improvement over yesterdays. I reached the field gate in 16 minutes 50 seconds, 36 seconds faster than yesterday, and completed the round trip in 34 minutes 40 seconds, 1 minutes 4 seconds faster than yesterday. This gave an average speed of 4.10km/h, 0.12km/h quicker than yesterday.

I don't know whether it was significant, but I wore the HiTech shoes rather than the old Reeboks today, and the legs were quite a lot more comfortable than they were yesterday.

Before lunch, I rearranged the contents of the remaining two builder's bags of garden debris – no mean task because Pat refuses to knock the soil off the weed roots

before she bags them – and got them, a large trug full of other rubbish and the old milk crate that holds our waste glass (mostly wine and beer bottles) into the back of the faithful Focus. The first bag was right at the limit of my lifting ability, but I managed to wrestle it into the boot, confident that there would be help at the tip. However, Sod's Law was at work – not a team-member in sight anywhere. I managed to get the bag up about halfway and hold it there with my thighs and belly, and was just rearranging my grip for the last heave when a kind gentleman offered a hand. I think I might have managed solo, but am far from sure!

After lunch I had to attack the car with the vacuum cleaner to shift all the muck that had leaked out of the holes in the bags. This involved prolonged gymnastics, after which I was totally whacked.

### **Thursday 28 May 2015**

Despite the aches and pains, I slept really well last night. I would have loved to stay in bed for a couple more hours but got up on the dot of 7:15am as usual. Things were still pretty stiff and sore, but the walk went reasonably well – faster than Tuesday but slower than yesterday. I reached the field gate in 17 minutes 13 seconds and home in 35 minutes 22 seconds, giving an average speed of 4.02km/h – 0.04 faster than Monday but 0.08 slower than yesterday. One more walk to go...

The rest of the day was spent on a trip to Buxton for grandson Ewan's 8<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration – as always, a lovely occasion. I handled the driving without much trouble from the ankle, but it was great to get the shoes and splint off when we got home.

### **Friday 29 May 2015**

I don't know what happened in the night, but when I got up for a pee around 3am and put weight on the left foot the pain was excruciating. I almost fell on the way to the en-suite, and had a real struggle getting back to bed. There was a repeat at around 5am, which left me lying restless in bed worrying about what was happening.

I have remarked before on the strange fact that the ankle seems to seize up when I am sitting still and then loosens after I have taken a few steps on it. This is quite consistent and very baffling. However, this morning's episodes were far more extreme than any previous episodes.

In spite of doing some flex-and-extend exercises and giving the foot a good hard massage, I still had a struggle getting up and dressed at 7:15am, and there was no question of going for a walk, even when the ankle had loosened up.

We had to go into town for Pat's 9am optician appointment. She needed me to drive because she was having drops to dilate her pupils for retinography (coincidentally, I have the same thing to go through at the hospital next Tuesday). I managed the driving by being careful to put the instep rather than the ball of the foot on the clutch pedal so that the ankle joint would not be activated, and walked down to Holland and Barrett for muesli ingredients while Pat checked in at the optician's. That was difficult, but I managed. I was so concerned that I bought some glucosamine tablets and Omega-3 fish oil capsules, in the hope that they might give all my joints some help, but specifically for the ankle.

I have spent the rest of the day lazily, in my socks. Every time I get up from the chair the ankle is very painful, but I have been able to walk around the house fairly easily.

I am hoping that this bout of severe pain is my reward for the trips to the tip on Tuesday and Wednesday, and that if I'm a bit careful for a few days things will return to normal.

## **Tuesday 2 June 2015**

The ankle was still very painful when I got up on Saturday morning, but I managed to drive to Retford and walk around the market – for the first time in some months using one crutch to support the left ankle, so this wasn't too much of an ordeal.

On Sunday morning I drove over to Sheffield to collect grandson Barney for a sleepover and some heavy film-watching. All three of us watched *The Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs* on Sunday and *Hannibal* on Monday morning. We took Barney home after lunch and had a lazy afternoon and evening watching the French Open, including a rather lacklustre but nevertheless winning performance by Andy Murray and a nail-biter for Rafa Nadal.

I had decided that, if all felt okay, I would restart the walking programme this morning. After waking around 5am and catnapping, I found that I was in danger of going right back to sleep at around 7am, and it took quite an act of will to get myself up at 7:15am – it would have been so easy to award the ankle just one more rest day! But I managed to drag myself out of bed at 7:15am and follow the usual routine.

The left leg felt weak and mildly painful when I set off, but I got up a reasonable rhythm, reaching the field gate in 17 minutes 3 seconds and home again in 35 minutes 11 seconds (both times faster than two out of last week's corresponding three times, which I found quite surprising).

I need to settle back into the regular pattern of five walks a week now, and to try to improve my times steadily. The aim is to get the field-gate time down consistently below 16 minutes 30 seconds and then to increase the distance to the next obvious landmark. I scored a 16:17 and a 16:12 on the 20 and 21 April but the best since then is a 16:35 on the 20 May.

## **Wednesday 3 June 2015**

Amazingly, after writing what I did yesterday, I reached the field gate this morning in exactly 16 minutes 30 seconds! Getting home took a little longer (total time 33 minutes 58 seconds. But the average speed of 4.19km/h was the second fastest since I started using the stop-watch at the end of March. Again, it wasn't a particularly comfortable walk, but from start to the half-way mark it felt fast. An hour or so after the walk, the left ankle was very painful.

## **Tuesday 9 June 2015**

As a parting gift, giant grandson Barney left me with a stinking cold which has now been plaguing me for a week. It had reached the painful-sinus stage now, and the cough shows no sign of going away. I am having to get up very early in the morning because my nose has got just clogged enough to make me breathe through my mouth, leading to unbearable dryness in the mouth and throat. Once I am up, the cough loosens and I am able to clear my chest, and a good blow removes most of the crud from my sinuses. Two paracetamols and a strong decongestant get me ready for the day.

But, alas, no walks for six days. Thanks to ITV4 for the French Open tennis and to the BBC for the Canadian grand prix!

However, I have managed to get plenty of stuff done, starting with mowing the lawn and continuing with the installation of a roller-blind on the window above our bed and a venetian blind on the study window. I have also had to sort out a major freezer crisis. Our upright freezer has a nasty habit of getting badly iced up and it chose this week to stop freezing. Luckily I caught it before the contents were defrosted, and we had room in the garage chest freezer. I left the freezer wide open all Sunday evening and night, but the ice slab was still pretty huge yesterday morning, so I had to resort to the fan heater, and even that took several hours to clear all the ice. This morning I

salvaged all the transferred food and rearranged it in a freezer now showing lower than -20degC on my digital thermometer.

Every day I hope the cold will show signs of disappearing, but none so far...

Meanwhile, the dodgy left ankle seems to have benefited from the lack of walking. Some of the jobs I've done have stressed it, but overall it feels stronger than a week ago. I will be taking it to town for the market tomorrow, cold permitting; we'll see how it stands up.

### **Wednesday 10 June 2015**

The cold symptoms were a little less unpleasant this morning than yesterday, so I have reason to hope that the infection is subsiding. I am still coughing quite a lot, but mostly with more control.

The left ankle was still feeling pretty good this morning, so I took the rather rash step of going to town without the AMS support – though I did put it in the shopping bag! I walked up the two-thirds of the length of the market to see Darren the fishmonger and down again to Wilkinsons, where I bought a few budget essentials. Then a slightly devious route back to the car via the public toilets, which turned out to be closed. I drove up to Aldi and did a lap there, picking up wine, chocolate, a nice looking sirloin steak to share on Saturday night, some milk and a few other odds and ends. Next I went to Asda for coffee and Fyffes' bananas, and on a few yards to the farm shop for fruit and vegetables. Finally, overshooting home, a very quick visit to the village Co-op for my Allinsons Extra-Strong White Bread Flour, which I couldn't get anywhere else. I arrived home about 90 minutes after I'd parked in town, having had no real protests from the ankle. As I write (after about 90 more minutes), it feels quite comfortable.

The next item on the agenda is to make a batch of sourdough focaccia, the previous one being almost finished (as I discovered when re-filling the defrosted freezer). I have 400 grams of refreshed sourdough sitting on the kitchen window-sill, will make the sponge before I go to bed tonight and will prepare the dough and bake three loaves tomorrow.

### **Monday 15 June 2015**

The cold symptoms had been subsiding over the weekend, and this morning I managed to wake up early and get up at 7:15am. I had a sneezing fit shortly before getting up but the consequent nose-blowings were fluid and colourless. There was no involuntary coughing and when I chose to cough it was loose and painless. I decided that I should try to get the walking programme back on schedule.

In spite of last Wednesday's adventure, because the left ankle was mildly sore, I decided to wear the splint – the first time it had been on for over a week. The legs were a bit wobbly when I set out, but they steadied after a few minutes and I managed to reach the field gate in 16 minutes 50 seconds – 20 seconds slower than the triumphant result on the 3 June but not bad after missing seven walks. I got home again in a total of 35 minutes 3 seconds – 1 minute 5 seconds slower than the 3 June time.

The lay-off seems to have rested the ankle and the swelling on top of the instep has disappeared, along with the very sharp pain. I have been particularly pleased that I can now stand up from my armchair painlessly every time whereas before I was always very tentative – and with good reason because the stiffened foot gave me a lot of pain for the first few steps.

I am shocked to see that this is page 100 of this rather self-obsessed document!

The other day I received a letter from the Royal Derby with an appointment at Mr Milner's clinic on the 27 July. I hope he doesn't decide that my management of the left ankle makes surgery unnecessary, because I really do think I need the fusion.

### **Tuesday 16 June 2015**

My internal alarm clock let me down this morning. I snapped awake very suddenly at 7:25am, feeling quite shaky and groggy for a few minutes. However, by the time I was ready for the walk I felt fairly normal (for this time of the morning!).

The legs felt rather weary, and it took me 17 minutes 19 seconds to reach the field gate – almost half a minute longer than yesterday. Surprisingly, I got home in 35 minutes 32 seconds, so the return half was done in the same time as yesterday.

### **Wednesday 17 June 2015**

Total technology failure this morning! After walking for a while I realised that I hadn't started the stopwatch. Based on the times normally taken to get to various landmarks I decided that adding two minutes would correct that – roughly. Then, when I got home, I discovered that *MyTracks* had recorded the times correctly but had stopped recording my movements at about a quarter of the way round!

Anyway, my estimated correction gave me a time to the field gate of 17 minutes 24 seconds, five seconds slower than yesterday, and a total time of 35 minutes 48 seconds, 16 seconds slower than yesterday, which looks pretty credible.

The left ankle was quite uncomfortable when I set off but it improved gradually. The HiTech walking shoes feel quite insecure, particularly when I first put them on. The left ankle seems to want to roll outwards (which is what wrecked the right one all those years ago, so not a good idea!). When the foot settles to its strange outward-pointing position it feels more secure, but the heel cups on the shoes are quite low and soft. I think I feel more secure in the ancient Reeboks, and to judge from last week's trip to the market even more so in the newer ones, even without the splint.

I decided to do my usual Wednesday trip to town, though without the market walk. I went to Sainsbury's and filled the car with diesel before doing a full lap of the store. On the way home I stopped off at the farm shop for fruit and vegetables, and when getting out of the car there the left ankle suddenly became very painful (I was wearing the newer Reeboks without the splint). It remained fairly uncomfortable through the day, though I managed to walk over to the surgery in the same footwear this afternoon without too much distress. This at least brought me good news – my blood pressure was 126/66! Apparently the first figure should ideally be below 120 and the second below 80, so at least mine is half right! The nurse was very pleased, anyway.

The ankle – and indeed everything below the left knee – was a bit tender for the rest of the day, but nothing I couldn't cope with.

### **Thursday 18 June 2015**

This morning everything technological seemed to have gone wrong. When I tried to start *MyTracks* outside the front door the Samsung's home button didn't raise a response – nothing. So I had visions of having to prise the phone out of its case, remove the batter and put it back, in the hope that a total power-down reset would solve the problem. However, just to be awkward, the phone came to life instantly after I got home. Bloody technology.

I walked in the old Reeboks with the splint today, and I felt more secure than in the HiTechs, so I think I might have to write those off – at least until *both* ankles are fully operational (if ever!). I reached the field gate in 17 minute 4 seconds and home in 35

minutes 7 seconds slower than Monday but faster than Tuesday and Wednesday with a fairly creditable average speed of 4.05km/h.

Technology armageddon mark two came when I switched on the PC ready to enter the stop-watch times into the spreadsheet. I had gone through to the kitchen to collect a cup of tea and when I got back the 'Starting Windows' screen was still on, apparently behaving quite normally. I waited patiently and it continued its little graphic ballet but got no further. Eventually, a little disgruntled, I forced a power-down and restarted the machine – with exactly the same result. This was repeated several times without achieving any progress. Feeling a little as if my right hand had been amputated, I hacked around looking for salvation, and eventually found out how to initiate a system restore. I remembered saving a hard-disc image and system restore data on one of my two external hard drives when I first got the machine, but I didn't have to tell the computer – it found the information and went off on a long, slow process of disc-churning. Rather than sit watching nothing much happen for hours – a sure recipe for anxiety and depression when you have been as dependent on computers as I have for as long as I have.

I decided to leave the PC to its machinations and mow the lawn. Then, this done, I pumped up the garden sprayer, already charged with several litres of Roundup, and went on a weed hunt. Between the back garden and the front area I came in to make coffee and – to my immense relief – found a fully operation PC on the desk. Which explains how I am writing this at around 11:30am, having sprayed round the front and made a second cup of coffee.

Various odd things have been happening on the PC lately, so I'm hoping that the system restore process may have hoovered up quite a few bugs.

This afternoon Andy Murray is back on court at Queens, so the ankle – which has coped fairly well with the mowing and weeding – old Reeboks *without* the splint – will be able to have a decent rest.

### **Friday 19 June 2015**

A pretty terrible walk this morning. When I got up the ankle was quite painful – more a strong general ache than the sharp pains I have been used to. It didn't get much better, but I was determined to try the walk, even if I thought I might have to cut it short.

In the event, I finished the usual distance, but it took me 17 minutes 58 seconds, 54 seconds longer than yesterday, to reach the field-gate and 37 minutes 7 second, exactly two minutes longer, to get back home. This was obviously disappointing, but as I hadn't expected even to do the full distance I was quite encouraged.

I am assuming that the lawn-mowing and weeding yesterday did the damage.

Later this morning we drove up to Tickhill for a bit of shopping. I was more-or-less alright driving, but I really struggled with the small amount of walking we did. I was intensely relieved to get home and take off the shoes and the splint, but after about 4 hours the ankle doesn't feel too bad. I have been sitting in front of the computer trying to get it reinstated – it failed even more catastrophically this morning, deciding it needed a full, clean reinstall of Windows, so I left System Restore do this and have spent most of the rest of the day putting my important bits of software back on.

We are planning to shop in Retford tomorrow morning. I hope I will be up to it. Then on Sunday we are minding the terrible two grandsons (they are great really!) all day!

### **Monday 22 June 2015**

We did go to Retford on Saturday morning and definitely wasn't up to the walking around. I did a quick trip round the rather small farmers' market, picked up two



dressed crabs from the fish stall and waited while Pat visited a few charity sheps. Then we drove home and spent the afternoon in a frenzy of food-preparation and cooking for another rescue mission to Buxton on Sunday, which meant that I was on my feet for the entire afternoon – not good.

I managed to drive to Buxton and back on Sunday, but I didn't do much else on my feet. The ankle was confined to Reeboks and the splint all day, and I was profoundly relieved to liberate it when we got home. I was disgusted to find that the satellite box had failed to record the tennis final at the Queen's Club, although it had collected the remainder of the interrupted (and excellent) semi-final between Andy Murray and Vitktor Troicki. We watched the semi and I decided that I might as well find out the result of the final. This made me even more frustrated, because Andy had won the final against the 6-foot 8-inch Kevin Anderson in a minute less time than he had spent finishing the semi!

This morning, I decided to bite the bullet and try to retrieve the final on *iPlayer*. First I checked that it was available via the BBC website on the PC and then managed to access it via the grotty little 'smart' TV box I bought some months ago – well worth watching even though we knew the result a resounding victory for Andy.

We had decided to make today a rest day as we had been so busy through the tail end of last week and the weekend, so I elected – wisely – not to walk this morning. I'm very glad I did, because now, at 4pm, the ankle is still very sore.

## **Tuesday 23 June 2015**

It was so sore and tender at 4:30am when I got up for my first pee of the night – I could literally hardly walk through to the *en-suite* – and I never really got back to sleep because it was painful in almost any position in bed. I just lay there, for much of the time worrying (as you do when you're not really quite fully awake) about it had I finally done something irrevocable to it, with a month to my appointment with Mr Milner?

There was obviously no question of a walk, so I stayed in bed until 8:15am. I was actually wondering how I would get down that pesky iron spiral staircase of ours while dressing, but I managed quite normally, and – when I kicked off the trainers and set off for the kitchen – I was able to walk reasonably normally, though with a few grunts and groans.

It's weird, because I can walk fairly well and even stand in the kitchen making tea and yogurt and setting up for breakfast, but if I sit down for any length of time the ankle starts to hurt like hell again. Even in my lovely leather recliner I struggle to find a half-comfortable position, but sitting at the computer isn't so bad. It is also odd that the pain spreads up the inside of my shin-bone as well as reappearing in the soft tissue on top of the instep, coming in punishing pulses as I put my weight on the foot.

Even if this continues, I think I might try a short walk in trainers and splint tomorrow...

## **Wednesday 24 June 2015**

That was way over-optimistic. I woke for a pee at 4:30am again this morning and had the same difficulty walking through to the loo severe pain on the inside of the ankle running up the shin-bone. It was, again, literally almost unbearable to put my full weight on the left foot. Yet, by the time I had had my pee and walked back to the bedside, the pain was beginning to ease and I was walking more easily.

The next pee-call, at 6:30am, was a repeat, as was finally getting out of bed at around 8:15am. By the time I had got downstairs in unlaced trainers, finding that I was now lowering myself on the right leg more easily with the left (I don't know whether this is real progress or not!), the ankle was beginning to ease, though the pain level was pretty bad. Lying in bed, awake through most of the seven or so hours

from pee number one, I had been getting really depressed. In an attempt to cheer myself up, I had tried looking back over what I had been achieving over the past few weeks, but was unable to recall exactly what had happened when.

So I think it might help if I did that now, with this diary as a reliable reference.

I did five walks in the week beginning 18 May. With a rest day on Monday 25 May and a sore ankle on the Friday of that week, I only managed three walks. I did only two on the 2 and 3 June, the Monday being marked 'Ankle too painful' but the Wednesday scoring the fastest time of all. Because of the cold, I didn't walk again until the 15 June, but did all five days that week, the last on the 19 June. That seems a long time ago now, but it was actually only last week and I have only missed three days of this week so far.

So the cold and the fairly continuous pain have obviously made time go slowly for me I haven't missed as many walks as I thought.

Taking the mid-May as a start, what else have I achieved?

16 May – Retford market.

17 May – Buxton and back.

19 May – temporary repair to window catch.

Week ending 22 May – food preparation and delivery for Anton and Alistair (on the feet for hours!).

26 May – one large and very heavy bag of garden refuse to the tip.

27 May – rearranged refuse in two more very heavy bags and took them to the tip.

28 May – Buxton for Ewan's birthday.

29 May – first really severe ankle pain when getting up for a pee. Took Pat to opticians and shopped.

30 May – Retford market.

31 May – drove to Sheffield to collect Barney.

1 June – drove Barney back to Sheffield.

8 June – freezer rescue part one.

9 June – mowed lawn. Installed roller blind and venetian blind. Freezer rescue part two.

10 June – big shopping trip without splint – no serious ill-effects. Sourdough preparation.

11 June – made sourdough focaccia.

17 June – big shopping trip – sudden pain on getting in/out of car. Start of really bad pain?

18 June – mowed lawn and sprayed weeds – ankle very bad the following day.

20 June – Retford Market – very difficult using crutch.

21 June – Buxton and back.

So not what you would call a lazy month.

The real damage may have been done with the mowing and weed-spraying last week, immediately following a bout of real pain while shopping the previous day, though the nocturnal pain started quite a while before that.

It is just under five weeks until my hospital appointment...

Later this afternoon I did a few odd jobs around the garden in the old Reeboks, unlaced, and the ankle felt better afterwards. Then sat watching TV for over an hour and it felt quite stiff and painful. Perhaps I need to get into the habit of flexing and extending the joint while sitting. As for the deterioration while I am asleep, I don't know what to do about that apart from doing the flexing and extending before standing up. And the difficulty in finding a comfortable position for the ankle in bed is also a problem.

### **Thursday 25 June 2015**

Ironically, the ankle was much more comfortable in bed last night, though getting up to pee was still quite agonising. This morning the inside of the ankle was less tender to the touch, the ankle itself is less swollen and so far (10:15am) moving around the house has been reasonably comfortable once I have loosened up.

Based on yesterday afternoon, I really should get out and do a little cautious walking.

### **Friday 26 June 2015**

I thought I might try a walk this morning, but it was raining when I got up.

Again, the foot had been much more comfortable through the night but still very difficult when walking to the *en-suite*. The first few steps were very painful, but things did ease up fairly quickly.

When I am lying in bed after such an excursion I get quite depressed and start wondering whether I should contact Claire at Derby to see if I can be seen sooner, but once on my feet I'm a little less gloomy.

I plan to do some crutch practice before the surgery (assuming Mr Milner is prepared to operate). Maybe I should start now, taking some of the strain off the ankle.

At around 10am I decided to try a short walk about the first five minutes of my regular route and then back again. I wore the newer Reeboks with the splint and took a crutch for moral support, which I used for a short distance but only putting a little weight on it. The pain varied between moderate and rather nasty, but I managed to keep up a reasonable pace. A few minutes after the walk, the pain wasn't too bad – more of a general ache than any specific local discomfort.

The ankle did stiffen up through the afternoon, though, and I was very grateful to find a parking space right outside the chippie when I went for our regular Friday dinner.

I can't believe that it is only a week since the 19 June when I did the last scheduled walk and the pain became quite severe, and only another week since I scored my record 16 minutes 30 seconds time to the field gate – it seems as if this spell of severe pain has been going on for ages. I am quite reassured that this is purely subjective and actually it has only been a week! That suggests that it *might* not be a permanent deterioration.

### **Saturday 27 June 2015**

This morning I am fairly convinced that yesterday's walk wasn't a very clever idea. My nocturnal trips to the loo were awkward and very painful, and at around 6am I had to take two paracetamols. I was rather restless from then on but very reluctant to leave the comfort of our bed.

I was convinced that today was Sunday and that I needed to get up and go across the road for the paper. While still safe in bed I was doubtful about this, but fortunately I realised that today was actually Saturday before I did anything foolish!

I cat-napped until Pat awoke and asked if I would like a cup of tea. Very unusually, we were still in bed after 9:30am. The ankle behaved much as normal, making it very difficult to walk at first but loosening up after a few careful steps.

I am really baffled by what is going on here. After being in bed, or even only a short time sitting down, I find it incredibly difficult to start walking. Something – mental or physical? - stops me taking a normal stride with the bad leg. Then, after a few steps, the leg starts behaving more sensibly, and once I am on the move I can walk fairly well, though far from normally.

The centre of the pain seems to have moved around over the weeks. The very sharp pain that seemed for a long time to originate in the tendons where the shin-bone joins the instep has completely disappeared, to be replaced by one centring on the inside of the actual ankle joint and somehow working its way up the inside of the shin-bone. I am also finding that the whole lower leg aches most of the time.

I haven't done so much of the flex-and-extend routine over the past few days. I really don't know whether it was helping or not. If I do it just before getting up from bed or a chair, it doesn't seem to make walking any easier or less painful.

When, as on last night's trip to the chippie, I have walked using trainers and the splint, I can't wait to get them off to relieve the pain. When I tried one of the ProSport elastic ankle protectors recently, the ankle quickly became very painful and again I was desperate to get the thing off. All this leaves me with nothing to fall back on for support, and I am spending most of my time barefoot. I might try the old neoprene ProSports. I have even considered buying one of the supports used by Andy Murray!

### **Monday 29 June 2015**

This morning I decided to get myself back into some sort of routine – I have become much too attached to my bed and my beautiful down-filled pillow. I had slept reasonably well and felt quite rested by 7-ish, so I formulated a plan! When walking, I get (got?) up at 7:15am, leave for the walk at about 7:40am and am back by about 8:15am. So I will get up at 8:15am every 'working' morning, just stealing the time I am saving by not walking. Actually, this isn't quite logical as I still have to fit in the ablutions and the first cup of tea, but never mind the most important thing is to get back into a routine.

I did two sets of 16 flex-and-extend exercises and one of 16 half-rotations. The ankle felt better for these when I got up, though it was still difficult to start walking, but I am not sure they have done any longer-term good. Though, having said that, I did get through changing the fitted sheets and pillow-cases, swapping the 9-tog down quilt for the 4.5-tog one, running the vacuum-cleaner rather cursorily round the bedroom and having a shower. The bit of the shower when I stand on the left leg to wash the right foot didn't go as well as it has been doing recently the ankle really did punish me!

The ankle had not improved much over Sunday and has still been pretty painful this morning. As planned, I tried a neoprene ProSport and it helped while I was changing the beds and vacuuming the bedroom, but like the other supports it had become too painful to wear by coffee time.

Today is the first day of Wimbledon fortnight, so I will get plenty of armchair time. Whether this will help remains to be seen.

### **Tuesday 30 June 2015**

I have been worried by what I can best describe as my assumption or acceptance of disability, so this morning I decided to drive up to the Co-op and do some essential shopping. The left ankle has been quite swollen lately, and with a sock and the splint

on it was a very tight fit in the newer Reebok trainer. However, I managed to walk on it ok and, although it was rather painful, I could operate the clutch without difficulty.

By the time I had filled two very heavy bags with shopping and got them home the ankle really was giving me a hard time, so once the shoes and splint were off I decided to put the old neoprene ProSport support on, and I kept this on until late in the evening without too much discomfort. Wearing this and flip-flops, I managed to take the bin out to the gate and to hose all the pots and planters that are scattered around the garden.

During the afternoon I took my high-accuracy kitchen digital thermometer outside and measure 30.6 degrees in deep shade. Tomorrow is forecase to be even hotter.

Apart from that, I have done little apart from watch the tennis and now – at 9pm – the ankle doesn't feel too bad.

### **Wednesday 1 July 2015 2015**

Getting up for a pee remained fairly painful through the night, but was much less painful at around 7am. I had had no discomfort at all in the ankle while in bed, and even the troublesome left shoulder had calmed right down. Maybe all my bits were exhausted by the 30-degree heat!

I felt so amazingly comfortable in bed that at 8:15am I awarded myself an extra 15 minutes, which I spent in a warm, dozy and above all pain-free state. I was tempted to stay where I was, but I didn't want to renege completely on my recent resolution. The reward was to get up without the usual weird difficulty starting to walk.

The ankle has been quite swollen for a couple of weeks, but this morning it was more-or-less its old shape. Obviously the ProSport is acting as a compression stocking.

I put the ProSport back on before walking anywhere. I won't pretend that the ankle is totally pain-free. In fact, the whole lower leg still has the dull ache I have mentioned before, but the pain level is quite low.

Today is going to be very hot, so I have already (at 9am) opened plenty of windows and doors.

I have brought in the bin and had another go at clearing the pond pump, which I did the other day. Now, with the temperature soaring, (11am) it's time for coffee.

Later on I had to unclog the pond pump again, but since then I have devoted most of my dwindling energy to the tennis well done, Heather Watson and bad Luck to Liam Broady. We are now waiting for the incredible Serena's second round match sadly, the winner (any doubts?) will play Heather!

It is now almost time (5:50pm) for a cold dinner and an even colder glass of Italian *spumante rose*. With every available window open, the temperature on the sitting-room window-sill, right next to my chair, is 30.8degC. I feel damp and greasy and smelly, and I will definitely need a very cool shower before I put my horrible body in contact with the bedding I changed only two days ago.

I have just put one of the white fabric ProSport supports on. I think it squeezes the ankle rather more than the elderly neoprene ones, but it doesn't feel uncomfortable as it did when I tried it a few months ago.

Later on it did start to feel painful, so I took it off and spent the rest of the day in bare feet – no hardship in the summer heat.

### **Friday 3 July 2015**

Yesterday morning I got up early and sat reading in a shady spot outside the back door, with a light breeze which was a huge relief.

We went across to Anton's in the morning, hoping to fix his fax machine, but the problem turned out to be a dead phone line. When we got home, Pat had a one-woman war with BT's clever but difficult speech-recognition software, succeeding in the end to get the fault identified.

The rest of the day was devoted to Wimbledon, with Murray, Federer and Nadal all playing. No worries for the first two but Nadal going out in an extraordinary match against an extraordinary opponent in Dustin Brown.

Yesterday I kept the neoprene ProSport on all day, and it got rather uncomfortable by evening. This morning I haven't had a support on at all, managing to do what has needed doing in bare feet.

This evening I walked over to the local chippie for our dinner, wearing the newer Reeboks and the splint. The ankle felt weak, so I used the crutch in my right hand. Sitting on the shop windowsill waiting for my fish to fry stiffened the ankle very quickly and now, three hours later, it is very sore and difficult to walk on.

### **Tuesday 7 July 2015**

On Saturday I did some rather painful shopping at the Co-op, but otherwise Wimbledon kept me anchored to the armchair.

On Sunday morning I walked to the local shop for the paper, wearing the HiTech shoes, which I am now convinced should not be used until I have had – and fully recovered from – the anticipated surgery (only three weeks until my appointment at the Royal Derby!). Even with a ProSport support, the ankle just isn't controlled enough – the shoe feels spongy and the foot tilts outwards.

Once recovered from this, I put on my faithful old mountain boots and wrestled the mower out of the shed. I wasn't at all sure that I would cope with cutting the grass, but – with a bit of a struggle – I managed it.

Yesterday was lazy, again thanks to Wimbledon, and this morning the left ankle doesn't feel bad at all. In fact, I am walking barefoot fairly normally. I have noticed that starting to walk after sitting or lying down is getting easier, without the strange hesitation before I can step off. Does this mean that I am still improving after whatever I did to make the ankle so bad? I hope so!

Also yesterday, BT reported, in a text message read out by a computer on our landline (is there no end to their ingenuity?), that Anton's phone line had been repaired. I sent him a fax and got a positive response, so he is contactable again.

Microsoft *Outlook* has just informed me that my sourdough needs refreshing. I only have enough focaccia for about three days, so I will be baking this week. Better get started...

### **Wednesday 8 July 2015**

I got up reasonably early this morning to get a batch of sourdough bread under way, and three focaccias were out of the oven by early afternoon – another 16 lunches sorted! This involved plenty of time on my feet – barefoot, as now seems so normal that I worry what will happen when I need to wear shoes! – and the ankle feels no worse for the work-out.

Otherwise today has been fairly lazy, thanks again to Wimbledon.

The ankle is definitely getting stronger at the moment. Now, when I get up from bed or the chair, I can walk away with much greater confidence.

### **Friday 10 July 2015**

I found out yesterday and this morning what happens when I wear shoes.

Yesterday morning I drove us over to Sheffield for the weekly visit to Anton, Pat's deaf and visually-impaired younger brother – he of the defective phone line, which was sorted by BT earlier this week. I decided to go because the left ankle was feeling much better than it had for a few days. I wore the newer Reeboks with a neoprene ProSport support, I was okay driving but when I got out of the car I had real trouble walking. On the way home we did a pretty comprehensive shop in Aldi, and I was very grateful for the trolley as a walking aid.

This morning, wearing the same shoes with the ActiveAnkle splint, I went over to our little shopping precinct for some cough remedies (it is still bothering me – I feel as bad as I ever have with this infection today) and cream for our strawberries as this is Wimbledon finals weekend. I managed on our eccentrically cambered pavements, but I was very relieved to get home and removed the footwear.

I have tried my posh Merrell outdoor-pursuits sandals this morning in place of the flip-flops, which simply won't stay on my feet. I only need them for going up- and downstairs, and for any brief sorties outside – barefoot is fine for the rest of the time. The heavily profiled soles are a bit of a challenge, but they feel a lot more secure than the flip-flops.

### **Saturday 11 July 2015**

I have just checked back on the spreadsheet my last full walk was on the 19 June – three weeks ago yesterday. In the diary entry for that date, I describe this as 'A pretty terrible walk ', which took around two minutes longer than the other four days that week. After that, I simply didn't feel able to tackle the full route.

It was the early morning of the 23 June when I had the first real difficulty walking to the en-suite, and the ankle has never really been comfortable since then.

I did try a short walk on the 26 June, which I managed but with quite a lot of pain.

Since then I have walked across to the local shopping precinct a few times and done a few supermarket laps after driving there, but I am now convinced that the ankle has taken a permanent turn for the worse and that I really do need surgery. This is in spite of my dread of being one-legged for six weeks!

There is, however, some light long before the end of the tunnel I did a Google search for 'leg crutch' and found something called iWALK 2.0 at <http://www.peglegs.co.uk/>. This sounds as if it could totally transform the experience of recovering from ankle surgery. Basically, you kneel on a shaped pad with the knee of your bad leg bent at 90 degrees. The lower leg is strapped to the pad and the device extends up the thigh to another strap. And the 'peg leg' goes down parallel with the thigh to a foot, on which it seems you can walk fairly normally, though with a straight leg. If this thing really works, I am going to be pretty cheesed off that I didn't hear about it prior to the first of my three ankle surgeries!

I will ask Claire or whoever I see at the hospital in two weeks about the device. If they say it works but the hospital cannot supply one, I will cough up the £150 to buy one and Ebay it when I have finished with it.

I am still trying to get used to the Merrell sandals, because it is beginning to seem as if I can't cope with shoes at all!

## Monday 13 July 2015

And in direct contradiction of that last sentence, I spent all day yesterday in the newer Reeboks with the splint, and was fairly comfortable – certainly no irresistible urge to take the shoes off.

I drove us to Buxton with the minimum of pain when declutching and mooched around stepson Alistair's house as much as I needed to. Then, while Pat and the others went to the fair, I watched the Wimbledon men's final – a depressing spectacle of what I felt was the decline of the mighty Roger Federer, on which, for some reason, the BBC commentators felt unable to remark. Then I drove down to the pub and met the others for a meal, after which I drove us home again. Then I *did* take the shoes off, because they were beginning to feel a little uncomfortable.

The ankle felt fairly good on my two or three nocturnal strolls to the loo and when I got up this morning after a round of ankle exercises. I have noticed that I can now get up from bed or a chair and step off immediately, rather than the rather hesitant process that seemed to have become the norm a few weeks ago.

I have just finished changing our bedding and running the vacuum-cleaner round the bedroom (barefoot) and the ankle still feels reasonable – though not reasonable enough to change my mind about surgery!

1:15pm I have just done a full neck-shoulders-back work-out – the first for quite a while. I noticed that my legs are rather weak and wobbly while doing the upper-body stuff, presumably because I am not walking as much now. In particular, I cannot do the side bends while standing at all, so I have to use a chair. Before leaving the chair I did ten stand-sits, which I hope will toughen the legs up. I need to get back into a regular routine with these exercises – at least five times a week.

## Tuesday 14 July 2015

Apart from a quick visit to the Co-op in the afternoon, yesterday was a lazy day physically and the ankle has been behaving fairly well. Getting up from the bed and the chair are much easier than they have been for a while, and I am walking quite well.

Walking barefoot makes me very aware of the behaviour of the foot, and I have noticed that the pressure is concentrated on the outside of the sole, suggesting that the ankle is rolling outwards.

I did the same exercises this morning as yesterday, with the addition of the ankle flex-and-extend routine which I had forgotten before getting up this morning.

3pm After a fairly lazy day so far, I have just walked down to the shed at the bottom of the garden and then taken the bin out. Walking (in the Merrell sandals) was quite awkward and painful – stiffness from too little exercise, or what?

## Wednesday 15 July 2015

For no obvious reason, the ankle has been very tender this morning. We went to our new favourite butcher in Tickhill, which was only a 15-minute drive and about a 5-minute walk each way, but I really struggled with the walking bit. Tickhill's pavements all have pretty steep cambers, and when I can't find one that slopes down to the right I really struggle.

Then, after we got home, it dawned on me that I had cut down on the paracetamol, because I had been taking it with the decongestant for this endless cold thing. So I took two when we got back and I *think* the ankle is more comfortable now.



I wore the newer Reeboks with the splint for shopping, and put the older ones on, still with the splint, when I got home. These are very worn on the outside corners of the heels, but are what I was wearing successfully for the walks until I stopped them.

5:30pm I just remembered that I am committed to doing the full exercise routine every weekday, and have just done it while still wearing the old Reeboks and the splint. My legs have been struggling with the standing exercises and felt quite unstable in the shoes – even the small heel elevation feels strange after spending so much time barefoot. I tried locking my knees and the left one would not lock out, and the ankle emitted some strange clicks and pops when I tried. These noises used to happen quite a lot when peeing, but haven't been evident lately, so maybe I have over-stressed the ankle and done some permanent new damage. Ah well – only twelve days until my hospital appointment.

The legs felt weary when doing the stand-sit routine, but I managed to do the full routine. I plan to keep the shoes and splint on until bedtime.

### **Thursday 16 July 2015**

I did as planned, only taking off the trainers and splint when I undressed for bed last night. This morning I put the trainers on without the splint, with the ankle feeling fairly comfortable. It is a relief to find that I haven't condemned myself to moving around barefoot or in socks for the rest of my life! The fact that I am most comfortable in a grimy, battered and worn old pair of once-white trainers is a minor problem.

11:45am I have just vacuumed the whole downstairs – a very sweaty process as this morning is pretty warm. I probably should have put the splint on, but the ankle handled even our weighty Sebo fairly well.

In between, I have finished off making stock from the carcass of Monday night's chicken.

Pat is off visiting Anton, so I will now have a lazy hour or so until lunchtime.

After lunch the kitchen power suddenly tripped out. As before, when I called out our utilities insurance people, I tracked the problem down to the garden electrics, which are connected to a fused spur which, unfortunately, is shared with the boiler. Once this was switched off I\* could at least restore power to everything else, but then had to go down the garden to investigate the summerhouse lights and power sockets. The problem was then isolated to one 13-amp plug feeding the pond pump and UV filter. At first, the UV unit seemed to be the problem, and when I isolated this from the mains everything else was fine. Except the pump, which ran for a short while and then stopped. At the moment I am stymied, but at least everything else is okay.

By the end of this, the left ankle was protesting loudly, but just before 4pm I managed to do the neck-shoulder-back routine with rather wobbly legs.

### **Friday 17 July 2015**

I was under the impression that pond pumps were wildly expensive, but a quite tour of Ebay and Amazon revealed that I can replace the present one for under £50. I will investigate again today – in a much more comfortable temperature than yesterday, when I worked up 'a right dab' as the locals here call a heavy sweat. I need to confirm that disconnecting the UV filter from the mains has solved the RCD trip problem and that the only outstanding problems is a pump that doesn't pump.

I noticed on my rather frequent visits to the loo during last night that I was walking well as soon as I left the bed, compared with the struggle I was having a week or two ago. I will put the splint on before my next visit to the pond.

The ankle is still rather uncomfortable after all yesterday's contortions, but manageable. I spent a lot more time on the pond pump after lunch today. The motor is running but the pump struggles to get the water to the top of the fountain tube, let alone up to the filter a couple of feet higher. There is no sign of any screwheads or other features that might make the pump serviceable, so I am going to have to find a new one. Meanwhile I have topped the pond right up to overflowing and used the spray to stir it and its blanket of weeks up.

Later this afternoon I walked across to the local shops using one crutch. This was rather painful, particularly on the way back with a bag containing two two-litre bottles of milk in the left hand – but I managed.

6:15pm I have just done all the hosing in the garden for the first time in ages, also a bit hard on the ankle. Tomorrow we are going to Retford farmers' market, which will be an interesting test!

### **Saturday 18 July 2015**

This morning's walk around Retford market was very painful and tiring – presumably due to yesterday's contortions around the garden pond. I was wearing the newer Reeboks with the splint and used one elbow crutch. After doing the essentials, I had to return to the car, leaving Pat to finish her own shopping. Anticipating this, I had synchronised the book I am currently reading on the Kindle for Android app on my phone and was able to while away half an hour or so quite happily.

The ankle has been quite painful for the rest of the day, but I have managed to do the exercise routine which I forgot yesterday.

### **Monday 20 July 2015**

Yesterday was a typically lazy Sunday, aided by Andy Murray's epic David Cup match against Gilles Simon. I did pop up to the Co-op for a few items before settling down, and the ankle protested even at this modest effort. However, we felt lazy and only had a snack supper instead of the planned roast beef, so it didn't get much more exercise before bed.

This morning, after the flex-and-extend routine in bed, it feels quite comfortable. After breakfast I will change the beds and have a shower. Then I plan to go for a haircut and a visit to the local water garden to research pond pumps. Following a little research on the Web yesterday, I now know what capacity of pump I need. I suspect that anything they have will be a lot more expensive than what I have found on Ebay.

The pump I chose was more expensive than on Ebay, but not enough to persuade me to wait for delivery. A couple of fiddly hours after lunch saw the new one installed and generating a fountain and a waterfall. The ankle was quite painful by the end of the job.

After a log, sleepy tea break, I did the neck-shoulders-back routine and went off to the kitchen to help prepare the roast beef dinner we should have had last night.

### **Tuesday 21 July 2015**

Yesterday morning I woke up for a pee before 5am and never really got back to sleep, which meant that I felt quite weary all day.

This morning I went for a pee at 5:25am and seemed to be awake for a long time. I was really fed up when I started needing another pee, but when came back and looked at my watch it was 7:25am, so I must have been asleep for quite a long time. Very unusually, I felt almost *totally* comfortable – exercises working at last? - and allowed myself the luxury of staying in bed until 8am. When I got up I noticed that the

left ankle was not swollen at all – a very rare situation. When I got downstairs it seemed to be working more naturally as I walked around the house.

My task for today was to lift the pond pump so that the fountain head is well clear of the water. The old pump had stood on a single layer of bricks, primarily to lift it out of any sediment, so the job was to locate these and put another layer on top. This involved lying face-down on the decking bridge and reaching down into the water. I could *just* reach the bricks and managed to get two more on top.

### **Wednesday 22 July 2015**

This morning was very strange. We needed milk, and as the ankle was feeling fairly comfortable I decided to walk over to the shops. When I reached the front door I decided I wouldn't need a crutch, and set off. I was astonished at how well I was walking I am sure that I felt worse than this when starting some of my regular walks. The leg was a little tired and sore on the way back, but nothing really distressing.

It really seems that my old belief in exercise for dodgy joints is confirmed. I have been doing quite a few jobs involving various contortions lately, and the ankle actually seems better for this.

The odd job for this morning is making a 1.2-litre batch of yogurt. My Thermos doesn't have a top as I sent that back to the service department, so I am having to improvise, covering the neck of the flask with clingfilm and putting a couple of sheets of kitchen roll, screwed up, inside the cup. But the good news from Thermos is that the flask has a 10-year warranty, so the nice lady there will be sending me a new one soon!

The rest of the morning was spent sorting old files and binning reams and reams of waste paper for recycling, ripping off all current names and addresses for shredding – really tedious, but revealing some interesting relics from years gone by!

### **Friday 24 July 2015**

I decided to go to Anton's with Pat this week, so I had a shower and put on my 'smart' trousers and polo shirt, and drove us across to Sheffield.

I noticed late yesterday afternoon that I couldn't see the top of the pond shower spray from the kitchen window. When I investigated, I found that the intake grids of the new pump had collected a thick coating of plant debris – all in a couple of days. I decided to postpone this job until this morning.

We decided to bring forward the fish-and-chip dinner from today, so I walked over to the precinct. Our chippy has changed its name from George's Traditional to 'Royal Catch', and I was half expecting to find it taken over by new Chinese proprietors, but found the delightful lady and her young assistant still in charge, though with new young lady assistants. I'm wondering if the *real* George chain has finally caught up with them...? Whatever, the fish-and-chips were both better than they had been a couple of weeks ago, and the mushy peas did me a real favour in the loo this morning!

Today I investigated the pump. I may have been a bit over-enthusiastic when lifting it from the pond, because the corrugated hose that leads to the filter had become disconnected. When doing the installation, I had tied a string round the hose and anchored it to the bridge, but I had taken that off when finished, relying on duct tape to hold the hose on – obviously a bad idea. After several minutes lying on my stomach on the bridge and fishing around with one hand, I still hadn't found the hose, so I decided to try with a rather strange hoe I inherited from my Dad. This hooked the hose straight away, and a piece of heavy garden wire twisted with big pliers made a good substitute for a jubilee clip.

Having finished that job, I pulled a pair of Anapurna mountain stockings (bought in the late 1970s and incredibly still almost as good as new) over my socks and the splint and then squeezed my feet into the heavy mountain boots. This gave me fairly adequate support, allowing me to manage the mighty Atco motor mower.

Finally – I hope – I went back to trainers and the splint and walked over to the shops for milk. The bad ankle felt remarkably good – just a dull background pain – even on the badly-cambered bits of walkway, and I walked fairly normally.

Rain was forecast for this afternoon, which gave me an excuse not to do any more strenuous stuff apart from the neck-shoulder-back routine, which I have done five times for the second week running. My shoulders were really sore from the lawn-mowing, but felt easier after the exercises.

After deciding to give up on our two village chippies, we decided to give the more local one the benefit of the doubt as it has had a change of name. So on with the trainers and splint again. The walk wasn't bad, and nor were the fish and chips, in spite of the shop still being under the same management.

All in all, I should feel well justified in surrendering myself to the Hungarian Grand Prix.

First, though, I need to put together a few notes on how I have managed since the last hospital appointment

*10/9/2014, five days after surgery on the right ankle. The left one was really struggling to work as the 'good' leg, so the zimmer and crutches were not really an option. I had been wheeling myself around successfully on my office chair so I decided to order a lightweight wheelchair on rental. This arrived the following day, and apart from some collateral damage to the house it was a great success.*

*13/10/2014 38 days after surgery – four days before the predicted six-week deadline – the X-rays were good so the cast was removed and I was allowed to weight-bear. I felt able to walk back into the house using two crutches but with both feet on the ground.*

*4/11/2014 First drive in car.*

*17/11/2014 Began going for walks, wearing trainers with the Active Ankle splint, whenever I felt capable. Up to 25/01/2014 did 14 walks, distances between 0.75 and 2.3km.*

*09/02/2015 Began programme of walks on the same route 5 days a week, aiming for at least 30 minutes. Distance increased to 2.3km. Completed 12 full 5-day weeks ending 19/06/2015 – 5 weeks ago. Average speed up to 4.25km/h. Left ankle too painful from then on to resume the 5-day walk programme.*

*Performance of ankle has been very variable, with surprisingly good days (though not good enough to start the walks again) and depressingly bad ones. For example, last Saturday, when shopping, I used a crutch but still had to cut my own activities short and go back to the car while Pat finished what she had to do. By contrast, today I managed to mow the lawn with our heavy motor mower and immediately afterwards walk to the local shops.*

*I can see no alternative to the fusion surgery now, so have started doing short practice sessions with the crutches each day, as I definitely don't want to have to resort to a wheelchair again, with the consequent fall in fitness.*

*Must remember to ask Claire about the iWALK.*

## **Monday 27 July 2015**

I got up at 7:45am this morning, and after a cup of tea I did the neck-shoulders-back routine. This is the slot formerly occupied by the walks, so it seems sensible to use it for the exercises.

After a fairly lazy weekend, and with nothing dramatic to report, we're finally off down to the hospital in a couple of hours. My bladder has been rather unstable for a few days so I'm going to be careful what I drink before we go. Water, maybe...

Mixed news from Mr Milner. He will be happy to fuse the left ankle, but he was very *unhappy* to see from the x-rays that his work last September on the right ankle had been undone. The two halves of the replacement implant were at a dramatic angle to one another again. I wasn't clear about precisely what had happened, but he said he needed to get in and sort it out again, and this time he expected to have to remove the implant and fuse the ankle. His air of urgency was worrying, but he did accept that the more painful left ankle would not work very well as 'the good leg' during recovery, and agreed that this should be done first.

So now I am back on the waiting list, hoping for a cancellation, and facing two operations back-to-back with a total recuperation period of six months. Claire said that the positive was that I have 'a good attitude'! So far I am accepting the bad news philosophically.

Mr Milner didn't know about the iWALK 2.0, but when I explained it he thought it looked like a good idea. So I think the plan now is to buy one – believe it or not, the only one on Ebay is the brand-new one supplied by the UK agent – use it for the two ops and then Ebay it. Meanwhile I will keep practising with the crutches.

We were both quite exhausted by the time we got home, and had an early night after a snack supper.

## **Tuesday 28 July 2015**

I wasn't so enthusiastic about getting up this morning, but managed to roll myself out of bed at 8am. I didn't do the exercises, though, after yesterday's good intentions.

This afternoon we were going to the funeral of an old acquaintance who had a horrific couple of years following a prostate cancer diagnosis. That would help to put my simple mechanical difficulties into perspective.

Pat's blood sugar was up at 13+, a pretty horrific level, and she felt groggy and shaky. However, we got changed and drove round to meet up with friends Sue and John, and it was Sue who spotted how poorly Pat looked and more-or-less insisted that we didn't go. So we came back home, got changed and settled down for some serious relaxation.

Then, just after 1pm, I decided to do the exercises. I have done them five times for two weeks now, and I really want to keep this up. I'm concerned at how weak and wobbly my legs have become since stopping the walks.

The rest of the day was fairly lazy – cleaning the fountain head on the new pond pump was the highlight physically, followed by refreshing the sourdough.

## **Wednesday 29 July 2015**

This morning the sourdough is safely back in the fridge, and I managed to do my neck-shoulder-back exercises before breakfast.

After breakfast I went to Asda and the farm shop for a few essentials. The left ankle was very painful and I was limping badly, but as soon as I got the shoes and splint off it eased quite quickly – maybe I had strapped the splint too tightly...?

Chatting with Pat and her friend Sue later, I decided that it would make all kinds of sense to buy an iWALK now rather than waiting until I have a date for the first operation. That way, I'll be able to get plenty of practice with both legs and use it to take some of the stress off the left ankle, which *really* felt as if it needed some relief today! I might even be able to do some walking for pleasure and exercise rather than just for necessity.

I ordered the device (goodbye, £166 including carriage!) at around 12:30pm. It should be here by Monday at the latest.

Apart from cooking a 500g pack of delicious *pruneaux d'Agen*, the essential adjunct to my home-made muesli and yogurt for breakfast, I have done very little since getting back from the shops, and am walking around the house fairly normally and without much discomfort in socks.

I got an email from Peglegs about the iWALK 'On its way for next working day delivery via UPS', so the device should arrive sometime tomorrow.

I managed to book a GP appointment online – got the senior partner at 7:10pm on the 10 August, which illustrates the difficulty of getting to see a doctor these days,

### **Thursday 30 July 2015**

I was very stiff when I got up this morning, so I didn't do the exercises before breakfast. I have to stay in to receive the iWALK while Pat goes to visit brother Anton, so I will have plenty of time later.

By 9:30am the stiffness had loosened up somewhat, but there was quite a sickening pain from the ankle. There was no specific centre of sharp pain or tenderness to the touch, but this duller pain spreading up the shin-bone and a more diffused ache all round the lower leg.

I realised that I hadn't done the ankle exercises in bed this morning and, come to think of it, I couldn't remember when I last did them. Perhaps I was paying the price for that laziness. I decided to try doing them in my recliner and see if that would ease the pain before trying the neck-shoulder-back routine. In the short term, at least, the ankle was more painful I had to go out and bring in the wheelie-bin and then to the garage to get a new bulb for my desk lamp, and I found that I was walking quite awkwardly.

I started the exercise routine at 11am. With both legs feeling stiff and achey, I wasn't confident that I would manage the whole programme, but I did (the stand-sits were hard!) and everything felt a lot better afterwards. The pain in the left ankle and shin had eased, and 90 minutes later I was still feeling the benefit.

I was getting increasingly impatient waiting for the iWALK to arrive, so at around 12:30pm I clicked the tracking link on the email and confirmed that it was 'out for delivery' from the Sheffield depot, with delivery expected today. I can't wait to get through the rather complex instructions and try it.

I'm hoping that my iWALK training period, designed to prepare for the rehabilitation after surgery, will take some of the strain off the left ankle, and that this in turn will be an incentive to use the device plenty and so be fully competent with it on both legs before surgery. I hope that, when the physiotherapists come round with their wretched elbow-crutches and zimmer-frames to assess me for discharge, they will be really amazed! And, of course, that my six-weeks of rehab with no weight-bearing will be a piece of cake compared with the previous experiences.

The iWALK arrived just before lunch and it took me until about 2:30pm to get it assembled and adjusted.

I have just had my first walk around the house, being careful always to have something to hold or lean on – a dado rail on the wall is fine. The initial impression is that the thing weighs a ton, but I am beginning to get the technique sorted. As with crutches, you move forward until the crutch is tilting forward, at which point it is quite natural to swing the good leg forward and transfer weight to it. There is a handle on top of the crutch which is useful in the beginning but I have already managed to let go of it and continue. The adjustment of the three straps is difficult.

Sitting down is quite easy. The lower leg adopts a natural vertical position with the crutch sloping downwards from the knee, and this will fit in the knee-hole of my desk or under the dining table quite happily. Standing back up has to be done with the good leg and hands, which is as it should be.

I had another 15-minute test later. I haven't yet felt able to walk hands-free, which is disappointing, and I almost fell over backwards before I could grab something on the way into the sitting-room to demonstrate my 'progress' to Pat.

### **Friday 31 July**

I did the exercises before breakfast again this morning, and for a change I did the standing and sitting elements on the hard kitchen floor instead of the carpet in the sitting-room. I have become aware that my legs are quite weak and that I am not locking my knees when doing the standing stuff, so I added in the hamstring-stretching exercise which I invented in the early stages of post-op rehabilitation, sitting in the recliner and repeatedly locking both legs out and holding them like that for a few seconds. I did this before the floor exercises and tried to lock the knees when doing the hamstring stretch (formerly known as 'touching my toes' but while sitting on the floor).

I had to put the trainers on to try the iWALK and kept them on, fully laced, until bedtime. They felt quite comfortable, so I have put them back on this morning. This is good news because it hasn't really been warm enough to walk around barefoot lately and my blasted socks keep coming off if I walk in stocking feet!

I am walking quite well, with very little pain, this morning, so I should be able to get on with some odd jobs.

For over 11 years I have maintained a mirror of my current bank account in an *Excel* spreadsheet. Every month I copy-and-paste the most recent month to create the next month's entries, to be edited as necessary. I have changed the month in the date field manually for all that time. Until this morning, that is. Today it occurred to me to use search-and-replace, starting from the blank line below the previous month, to change '08' to '09' in a couple of keystrokes and a click. All those wasted hours of editing!

I managed to bag up quite a pile of garden refuse, ready for a trip to the tip, but by the time I had done that I didn't feel up to the trip and put it off, perhaps to this afternoon.

I decided to try the iWALK with the crutches as a safety-net this morning, in the hope that I could start walking around without relying on having something solid to lean on. This worked quite well and in a few minutes I was using only the right-hand crutch, though I still carried the left-hand one for emergencies.

The iWALK feels a bit sloppy on my leg, because I don't seem to have got the straps adjusted properly yet. Obviously the device needs to be very firmly strapped on before I will feel safe committing my weight (and safety) to it. Getting into it while standing is really difficult, but adjusting the straps while sitting is a lot easier.

After weeks of only feeling comfortable barefoot or in socks, I am now wearing the trainers, with or without the splint, all day – from choice! Today I am walking quite

naturally, even putting the left foot down heel-first and rolling it onto the toe. This is something I haven't done for quite a while – at least since I stopped the morning walks. However, I struggle on uneven surfaces, as when sorting out the bags of garden refuse this morning or just walking down the lawn to check on the pond. This is part of a general weakness in the legs which may explain why I am not learning to use the iWALK as quickly as the instructional videos suggest I should.

I didn't feel up to the tip trip this afternoon, so that will have to wait until next week.

## **Sunday 2 August 2015**

Yesterday morning I drove us to Buxton to visit Alistair and family. We had a fast, trouble-free drive – amazing on a summer Saturday in the Peak Park! - and the same coming back in the evening. I wasn't on my feet much while we were there so the ankle felt pretty good (in trainers and splint) but my legs were quite stiff and sore when we left after several trips up and down the long straight staircase to the bathroom. We were both very tired by the time we got settled at home.

This morning we had a serious lie-in. I cat-napped from 6:30am, but Pat seemed to sleep pretty soundly – until 10am!

I did a quick drive to the Co-op for some essentials and then we had a very French breakfast of coffee and croissants brought back from France in April for the freezer.

Later, I booked us a three-night hotel break in Cumbria at the end of next week. We are about due for a treat.

Later still, I did something really stupid I was slicing potatoes for *pommes dauphinoises* on the mandolin, and left it one pass too late before switching from fingers to the handle device, taking small but deep slice out of the tips of my thumb and forefinger. I managed to staunch the considerable bleeding with plasters, but I had a problem with carrying on cooking we had none of the little latex 'cots' – exactly like miniature condoms – to keep my bloody dressings away from the food. I had to resort to cutting fingers out of rubber gloves. Except that they weren't rubber but far less stretchy vinyl – very tight to get on and rather uncomfortable.

I managed not to bash the fingers while in bed, so I got a normal night's sleep.

## **Monday 3 August 2015**

This morning I went over to the local pharmacy for some dressing materials for my fingers, and found that they didn't have any of the mini-condoms.

The walk there and back was quick, easy and fairly painless.

A short drive to the next village, which has a much larger pharmacy, solved the problem. Waiting until Pat went out to see brother Anton, I prepared a basin of warm, salty water for cleaning away the dried blood, of which there was quite a lot, and a ramekin of 50/50 TCP mixture, for a powerful antiseptic soak lasting several minutes. The fingers looked a lot better with reasonably neat Tubegauz dressings secured with Elastoplast strip.

I can operate the mouse button with the index finger but am using the second finger for typing, which is working surprisingly well – though I keep pressing the right button with that finger, instead of the left with the index finger, and getting a menu!

At 12 noon I did the first of this week's exercise routines. I don't know if I'll be practising with the iWALK for a few days.

The rest of the day was quiet, with nothing much to report, except that my Tubegauz dressings were wearing out very quickly.



## Tuesday 4 August 2015

This morning I made a batch of yogurt, using the half-hour waiting periods to re-dress the finger and thumb. The main reasons the dressings were wearing out so fast were that the Elastoplast strip didn't stick very well either to the gauze or to itself and that I had snagged the gauze several times when trying to trim it with a blunt pair of scissors, leaving loose ends that soon got caught on anything conveniently sharp.

This morning's efforts were a lot better as I had found a pair of razor-sharp Kitchen Devils scissors. I left the sticking-plaster dressings on the wounds and soaked them again for about 15 minutes in 50/50 TCP. I then waited for this to dry before applying the gauze. It wasn't long before the end of the Elastoplast on my thumb started peeling back, so I anchored it down with a couple of turns of microfibre tape.

Once the yogurt was put aside to ferment (in the beautiful new Thermos, of course!) I finished off the stock I started making yesterday from the remains of a roast chicken.

Finally, just before lunch, I emptied one of Pat's less bulking trugs of green refuse from the garden into the green land-fill bit and, with heavy-duty rigger's gloves on to protect my dressings, took the bin out to the gate.

So far the ankle isn't giving me much grief. In fact, it has been better during the past few days than it has for several weeks, as witnessed by yesterday's easy walk to the pharmacy – a route over pavements with particularly eccentric and troublesome cambers.

I did a few contortions on the pond bridge, trying to reduce the flow to the fountain so it might stop sucking up plant debris and clogging itself up. No joy so far. I also caerted some ironing up the spiral staircase because, believe it or not, I am better on the stairs than Pat. This lumbered me with my least favourite job – putting my polo shirts on hangers.

I did the neck-shoulders-back routine just before 4 o'clock tea. All the exercises have got a lot easier since I started the five-days-a-week programme. Most noticeable are the side bends. I did these standing for years but since the legs became weaker after the last operation I have been doing them on a dining chair. When I first started this, I managed to touch the floor with my fingertips once or twice out of the eight repeats, but only on the right side. Now I touch down every time on both sides.

I am disappointed that, even after some weeks doing five routines, I still have some quite serious intermittent pain in both shoulders, particularly when sitting holding a book for the Kindle. This goes away quickly when I start moving around.

## Wednesday 5 August 2015

This morning, after a period in which we have both felt pretty lethargic, we decided to get off our backsides and go into town for a bit of essential shopping. My ankles were feeling comfortable, and when I got out of the car to walk to the parking ticket machine I found that I was walking really well.

I decided to err on the side of caution and use a crutch to support the left ankle, but I didn't put much weight on it. I found that I was naturally walking far more quickly than usual, with no real limp, and actually *enjoying* it. I did the 500 or so metres up the hill to Darren the fishmonger's stall and had a pleasant reunion with him while choosing a salmon-tail fillet and some seabass fillets. Then I walked equally quickly back down the hill, stopping in Boots (where I met Pat) for some sticking plasters and Wilkinsons for some plant food. We then returned to the car and came home for a depareately-needed coffee – or two.

This was probably the best walking I had done since first the cold and then the ankle put a stop to my regular morning walks. I expected to suffer later, but the ankle continued to be comfortable all day.

I think the hamstring exercises I have added to the ankle ones may have helped, and when I did my neck-shoulders-back routine late this afternoon I found that I was standing with my legs locked instead of slightly flexed, without any of the knee-wobbles I have been experiencing. I also noticed earlier that I was getting up and down the spiral staircase on alternated legs much more easily. In short, my legs are beginning to feel much stronger than they have been recently. This is great, because I have been getting rather worried about their weakness.

I am looking forward to getting back to work on the crutches and the iWALK as soon as my injured fingers feel safe.

### **Friday 7 August 2015**

I got up at 7am yesterday morning to get an early start on a batch of sourdough focaccia. This went exactly according to plan and the three loaves were set to rise, well oiled and under clingfilm, at 10:40am. The plan was to go out and do some food shopping in the 2½-hour rise period, but Pat wasn't feeling too good so we decided to put the shopping off until today. So, apart from baking, cooling, cutting, bagging and freezing the bread I had a fairly lazy day.

When it was time to do the neck-shoulder-back routine I realised that my shoulders had been quite painful while sitting and reading, so I decided to drop the shoulder exercises. The shoulders were noticeably better through the rest of the day and in bed, and feel good this morning, so this looks like a good decision. I will give this a week unless they get stiff or sore.

I had quite a bit of cooking to do for a celebration dinner, with *foie gras* that Pat gave me for Christmas (or my birthday...?) washed down with the half-bottle of Champagne we brought back from Le Manoir, followed by a rather nondescript sirloin steak with jacket potato, garlic mushrooms and peas. Dessert was an Aldi chocolate ice-cream lolly (a lot cheaper than a Magnum and at least as good). We should have had one of the very special pastries from the Welbeck farm shop, but that will have to wait for tonight.

The ankle behaved very well with all the baking and cooking. It is feeling very comfortable this morning. I have no idea why it has improved so dramatically this week, apart from the fact that I am keeping on with the early morning exercises.

My stupid bladder gave me a restless night, so I am feeling a bit weary this morning. However, we will do the shopping if Pat feels up to it. If not, I will pop out for a few bits.

I have just booked an appointment with the doctor (a good trick these days – thank Heaven for online booking!) to arrange a urology referral, as advised by Mr Milner.

We went to the butcher in Tickhill, the Welbeck Farm Shop and Sainsbury's without much protest from the ankle but a lot of pain in the wallet. By the time we got home my feet – rather than the ankle – were protesting loudly, and I was glad to sit down.

Later on, though, I managed to get the big boots on and mow the lawn to make a nice play environment for our wonderful grand-niece Anya, who will be visiting tomorrow and doesn't have a garden.

All that done, it was a lazy evening with frozen scampi and fries thrown in the oven and some of the delicious patisserie from Welbeck.

## Sunday 9 August 2015

Yesterday was quite busy preparing for and enjoying a visit from Pat's lovely niece Bex and her delightful 20-month-old daughter Anya. We spent most of the morning putting together a totally excessive cold spread (the Marsdens never knowingly undercatered), much of the afternoon entertaining Anya, a short but intense spell putting together The Ultimate Doggy Bag for Bex's ever-hungry husband Andy, and a quick, efficient clearing-up job. Then we collapsed.

One notable moment at bedtime I forgot to take my wallet upstairs, and – having been burgled once – I didn't want to leave it downstairs overnight. So I came back down the spiral staircase very quickly on alternate legs and back up again equally fast, feeling very comfortable in both directions. I really seem to be on a good run with the ankle at the moment.

I have just walked over for the paper wearing a neoprene ankle-support because I forgot to bring the AMS support down and didn't want to disturb Pat going back up for it. I was able to walk quite briskly and more-or-less painlessly, so the good spell continues. I think doing the short workout of ankle flexes, extensions and half-rotations, knee lockouts and knee flexes and extensions seven mornings a week is really paying dividends.

The shoulders were quite painful sitting and in bed last night, probably from mowing our dried-up lawn on Friday. I carry on omitting the shoulder exercises from the weekday workout for a while.

## Tuesday 11 August 2015

Yesterday morning I had a doctor's appointment for bladder and bowels, which went well, and this morning the surgery rang to book me an appointment in Urology in mid-September – pretty good, Bassetlaw.

The rest of the morning was taken up with driving Pat to visit Anton in Sheffield because she didn't seem well enough to drive herself her blood sugar was over 11, which is much too high for safety. We had to come home via the surgery, because I had inadvertently put my new prescription in the collection box with my urine specimen!

Nothing significant happened for the rest of the day, with me only remembering at the last minute before cooking dinner (*spaghetti al pesto con pecorino* – really taxing!)

This morning, I finally decided to bite the bullet and get rid of the two big builder's bags of garden refuse that have sat in the front garden for several weeks. I had been putting this off for over a week because I didn't want to undo the healing of the fingers I had cut on the mandolin just over a week ago. However, these had healed very well and I hadn't used plasters on them for a few days. They were still a little tender, but I thought my rigger's gloves would provide more than enough protection.

Fortunately, we have had very little rain since Pat did her gardening and many warm, dry days, so the bags were much lighter than when we filled them. I had no trouble loading them into the back of the Focus.

I also had an overflowing milk-crate of assorted bottles and jars. I filled a big French shopping bag to stabilise the crate and loaded these into the car.

At the tip, an attendant was helping a blonde lady in shorts and a vest-top that showed some cleavage. Unjustly, I thought he might be less eager to help me, but as soon as he was free he insisted on helping me empty one bag and doing the other on himself.

Our local bottle bank requires me to separate clear, brown and green glass but the skips at the tip are much easier all colours go in together. So that was a job quickly done.

It was only when I got to bed that I realised I had forgotten my exercises. I was not sufficiently concerned to go back downstairs.

The ankle continues to be moderately but bearably painful, and is not hampering me very much.

### **Wednesday 13 August 2015**

This morning I decided to do the exercises before breakfast, and only to omit the inward and outward windmill elements, which are the shoulder exercises most likely to have over-stressed the joints. The rest went quite painlessly, so this was probably a good decision.

After breakfast I went first to Aldi and then to Sainsbury's, mainly because I was down to my last bottle of everyday red wine (Toro Loco, £3.79).

On Friday we are off to (probably) rainy Cumbria for our three-night break in the Western Lakes. The satnav estimates this to be about a 3½-hour drive (presumably up the A1 to Scotch Corner and then crossing the Pennines on the beautiful A66. The BBC is forecasting heavy rain, so I thought I should check the and adjust tyre pressures on the Focus they were all slightly high and I managed to release just enough air to get all four to within 0.5lb/in<sup>2</sup> (the correct version of PSI), with only the front two half-a-pound over – so probably the most accurately they have been set since the last service.

### **Thursday 14 August 2015**

In preparation for our Cumbria trip, having emptied the car completely, I took it up the road for a £10 mini-valet, carried out very conscientiously by a pleasant young man who, I guessed, was probably Polish.

When I got back I put a carefully selected mix of the stuff back in the car, leaving a small pile on the study floor to be put back after the trip.

Then my various other preparations were interrupted by the arrival of the window-cleaner, which meant that I had to clear the decks for him in the conservatory and put everything back together when he had finished.

After lunch, I did today's neck-shoulder-back routine, still omitting the windmill elements.

This will be the last entry until Monday evening at the earliest.

### **Tuesday 18 August 2015**

After a nightmare drive up, we had a very enjoyable break, if rather limited by my poor walking, though actually the ankle behaved fairly well. We had a lot of shallow stairs to climb to our room, but both ascent and descent gave it a good workout without over-stressing it. It coped with the long drives very well – even the high passes (see below).

On the way up, my mobile rang. Pat took the call – from Mr Milner's secretary. My left (I hope!) ankle fusion is booked for the 30 September with the pre-op assessment on the 8 September. I've been awaiting this news eagerly, but now it is happening I feel a bit wobbly about it. However, it has to happen. I can't go on like this.

Our hotel and its staff were delightful, even if some of the food fell a bit short of our usual standards – the high spot was battered haddock with chips, mushy peas and a totally incongruous side salad. The fish and its batter were cooked to perfection –

honestly the best we had ever tasted. The more 'fine dining' stuff was less satisfactory, which is what you would expect for a three-course meal costing only £25.

We visited three little old seaside towns on Saturday, of which only Silloch on the Solway Coast was worth an extended visit a delicious sandwich in a very strange little cafe and a short sit in the sun (and wind) on the promenade.

On Sunday we went off round The Lakes with every intention of taking a cruise on Windermere or Coniston, but we had reckoned without the fact that this was at the weekend in the height of the summer holiday season. We were literally unable to park and get out of the car (apart from a quick stop in a disabled space while I went for a pee) until we found our way to the Wrynose and Hard Knott passes. At the beginning of the first we found a pleasant pub where we enjoyed a pot of tea and cakes in lieu of lunch. Then a really challenging traverse of the two passes against heavy holiday traffic.

On the way home we decided to by-pass the A66 and Scotch Corner, choosing instead to go three or four junctions down the M6 and then traverse the Yorkshire Dales, which were mostly quiet and totally delightful. A stroll around the pretty little town of Hawes followed by a good big sandwich and more tea fortified us for the drive back to the A1 at Bedale and home.

Memo never go near a major tourist attraction again in the middle of August.

Today has been a fairly peaceful wind-down and return to our usual routine.

### **Wednesday 19 August 2015**

I made a lot of visits to the en-suite through last night and the early morning. It's difficult to remember precisely how many, so I have decided to put a notepad in there and make a mark every time I go – if there is enough light for me to see what I'm doing.

As a result I was weary when I decided to get up at 8am, and could easily have stayed in bed for another hour. However, my wittling mechanism was in high gear, so I thought it best to get the day started.

One of my wittles was about how mobile I would be able to get myself before the operation. The 30 September is exactly six weeks today. This could be good news, because if I can get discharged in 48 hours I won't be trapped in the hospital for the weekend – though I don't think the Royal Derby goes to sleep for the weekends any more.

The first target is to get myself walking as well as possible using the elbow crutches. I now know that my attempts on previous discharge days, when I put the crutch tips down well ahead of my feet and tried to hop forward, were totally wrong. The correct method is to put the tips down beside the feet and then rock forward, moving the good foot forward to make the tripod. It is a question of building the confidence to go off-balance deliberately, knowing that the good foot can be moved forward easily. This is the technique recommended for the iWALK. So, knowing this, I need to practice walking every day, building up both confidence and strength.

Then there is the problem of getting in and out of the front door, presumably taking a step in the same way but absorbing the rise or drop when placing the good foot.

There is no way I'll be able to get out of – let alone in through – the back door the step is far too high. However, I think I'll have a sporting chance of managing the much lower step to the conservatory.

I don't intend to rush with the iWALK. I want to get the crutch technique thoroughly mastered first.

I will also need to practice with the zimmer frame, getting out of the car and into the house, as I may be a bit shaky when I first come home. I don't want to be reduced to falling backwards on my arse on the doorstep as I was before!

So, to begin with, I need to do at least some crutch walking every day of those six weeks.

I began before lunch today with a couple of walks from the front door down the passage, round the kitchen table and back again. My movement wasn't exactly smooth and fluid but I managed to walk without too much exertion. Then I went out onto the drive - having managed at the first attempt to hop down the front step – and walked around out there for a while before trying several times to hop back up the front step. This was not a success the bad foot ended up coming down to help balance in spite of my trying to keep it up. Not a bad start, though.

Shortly before dinner I remembered that I am supposed to do the neck-shoulder-back routine, and did this before retiring to the kitchen to cook a Cumberland sausage ring actually bought in Cumbria.

### **Friday 21 August 2015**

Quite a tiring day yesterday. We were up before 7am and off to Buxton by 7:30am to do a day of grandson-minding so that Julie could help ailing Alistair with a big decorating job. Ewan and Tom are, to say the least, boisterous – though they settled very well to disc 2 of *The Fellowship of the Ring* – not bad for one aged 8 and the other aged 4. In the afternoon we took them to the Little Rascals indoor play centre to run off a lot of spare energy. We headed home at about 7:30pm. arriving totally exhausted and staying in bed until around 10:30am this morning – and unheard-of event for us.

We have done very little since breakfast.

### **Saturday 22 August 2015**

We got an email to say that my stepson Steve, his wife and two daughters would like t60 pop in tomorrow lunchtime, so we have been getting a light lunch together for them. This in between watching the end of final practice and qualification for the Belgian Grand Prix. Otherwise, a lazy day with an easy dinner of leftover mash and baked beans with a shared Aldi sirloin steak. I didn't think I could handle a two-hour *Young Montalbano*, so I had a shower shortly after 9pm and an early night.

### **Sunday 23 August 2015**

I got a small joint of shoulder pork in the oven for a long, slow roast at 9am and we are just putting the finishing touches to the 'light lunch', which included a second visit to the Co-op for the bits I forgot yesterday. Just some strawberries to trim now, I think.

The day went really well – lovely to see Steve's lot.

### **Monday 24 August 2015**

I did the neck-shoulder-back routine quite painlessly straight after breakfast this morning. It occurred to me yesterday that, if I work really seriously on the mobility of my lumbar spine I should have a better chance of getting a spinal anaesthetic rather than a general. As I am convinced that the general a year ago left me feeling rough for quite a long time, this must be a serious target.

The back exercises flex, extend and twist the lower back as far as it will go, so eight repeats a day for another 5½ weeks should improve my chances. I can't believe that

a competent anaesthetist won't be able to slip a needle between the vertebrae if I sit with my back flexed to its limit.

11:40am I have just done three laps on the crutches, starting at the front door, going the length of the house, round the kitchen and back to the front door – about 25 to 30 metres per lap. The technique is a bit halting and laborious, I feel a little out-of-breath and my shoulder muscles are – the right side particularly – sore.

I still think that the best technique is to place the crutch tips in a straight line with the good foot, rock forwards and just step. So far, I am tending to plant the tips ahead of the foot, which makes it more difficult to rock my weight over the balance point. If I want a longer stride I have to do it with the good leg, which means allowing the crutches to tilt further and reaching out with the foot. I have seen young people walking on crutches at the hospital who are almost running, but as I can't run using both legs I don't think that is a realistic target!

I think I need to strengthen my arm and shoulder muscles but, in the absence of a set of parallel bars, I'm not quite sure how. Maybe I could lengthen the crutches and work leaning back against a wall...?

Or maybe not I discovered that the crutches only have one unused set of holes, which don't make them long enough to bend my elbows enough. In fact, I just tried walking with them set at maximum length and I think that might be better than 25mm less!

My next two bright ideas were a kitchen worktop (too low) and the kitchen window-sill (too high), so I may just have to be satisfied with the pressup-but-keep-the-pelvis-on-the-floor exercise which is already part of my daily routine. Maybe I could even try lifting the pelvis a bit...?

I just tried – and amazed myself by doing five slightly droopy pressups, launching by lifting the whole body clear of the floor but then straightening it once the arms are locked then lowering the pelvis to maintain the spinal extension component. That way I could build the arm exercise into the daily routine. Analysing what is happening a little more carefully reveals that I cannot start lifting the body from the prostrate position but once the arms are about halfway to locking out I can lift the body and complete the pressup. That makes sense the most demanding part of the pressup is initiating the lift with the arms fully flexed. Once the elbows are partly straightened the lifting power of the arms is much greater. As I am never going to have the arms slightly flexed with the crutches this should give me some useful strengthening.

12:50pm I have just googled walking technique with crutches and been told the opposite of what I had decided was correct (see paragraph 4 of this entry). An NHS guide from the physiotherapy department at Hillingdon Hospital (my local hospital before I left London!) tells me to put the crutch tips down ahead of the good foot and then 'hop' to place the foot between the crutches.

This surprised me because I can remember being checked out by the physio before discharge from hospital and finding the hopping method very difficult. Maybe this was because I was still groggy from surgery but insanely eager to escape! Also, I don't think I was rocking my weight forward, so it was tending to fall backwards as I hopped.

I tried it after reading the Hillingdon guide, and frankly I don't think there is much to choose between the two techniques! I think the real step forward will be when improving strength and confidence allow me to do the hop but land well forward of the crutch tips, thereby combining the two.

I have just checked adjustment instructions for the handgrip and cuff heights, as a result of which I have reduced the handgrip height to what it was before I started

experimenting today and increased the cuff height by one 25mm step. That should optimise the crutches for my height and arm-length.

## **Tuesday 25 August 2015**

I tried to do the 'slightly droopy pressups' described yesterday in place of the usual spinal extension exercise, but I found it very difficult to combine the two. So from now on, I will do the extensions as usual and the droopies separately. The way they seem to work reasonably as described yesterday.

If I try lifting from the prostrate position – with my chin and chest on the floor – there is no way I can do it. However, if I start the extension and, when the chest is clear of the floor, straighten the body I can finish the pressup fairly convincingly and lower myself most of the way back down under reasonable control. Maybe with repetition I will be able to make this more like a 'real' pressup.

I find it hard to believe that, if I keep up all the spinal exercises – flex, extend and rotate – every day until the day before my surgery, the anaesthetist will not be able to slip his needle between my vertebrae. To convince myself, I have just stood sideways-on to a wall mirror and bent forward, reaching down to touch my shins, and had a look at myself in profile. My back seems to be fairly evenly curved, which means that all the inter-vertebral joints should be open. I will raise this with Mr Milner at my pre-op assessment and with the anaesthetist when I see him on the big day.

So, far from being just a healthy maintenance job on my neck, shoulders and back, the exercise routine is evolving into a conditioning programme specifically geared to facilitate a spinal anaesthetic and subsequent improved mobility with crutches.

My shoulders were a little uncomfortable in bed last night and early this morning, but I have managed to do a bit of crutch work. The initial results are a little disappointing, but I'm sure I will improve my technique with practice.

I tried a couple of experimental exercises intended to strengthen arms and shoulders. One involved standing with my back to a kitchen worktop and taking as much of my weight as possible on my hands. Another was a sort of standing pressup using the crutches I placed the crutch tips about a metre in front of my feet and leaned on the handgrips, and then dipped by allowing my elbows to bend and pushing myself back up by straightening my arms. Any use? I really have no idea at this point, but anything I try must contribute a little to my strength!

The ankle is quite painful this afternoon after an aborted visit to the hairdresser, who had a nasty fluey bug and decided she didn't feel up to cutting my hair, followed by a visit to Sainsbury's for diesel and Asda for coffee, milk and orange juice (I have discovered that their own brand has about half as much sugar as those from the Co-op and Sainsbury's). I changed into joggers to do my exercises, which involved taking the splint off and putting it back on. I don't know if it was an error in adjusting the straps, or what, but the ankle instantly became very sore. I took the splint off and have been feeling better, but I haven't enjoyed my trips round the house on crutches very much.

It's five weeks and one day until the operation – 36 days. This should be plenty of time to get myself physically ready...surely? And two weeks today until the pre-op assessment.

## **Wednesday 26 August 2015**

I did the exercises before breakfast this morning, and concluded very quickly that the 'sloppy pressups' would have to be an extra rather than a modification of the back-extension exercise. I had to stop at four repeats, not because the exercise was too hard or too strenuous but because I have a broken nail on my right big-toe and this was too painful to carry on! I managed the rest of the exercises, though.

Updated 13:56 24/1/20



We went into town this morning and I did a similar lap round the market to the one I was so pleased with a few weeks ago, using the crutch on the right arm. The ankle was not as painless as on the last visit, but I did fairly well. However, by the time we got home it was really sore and I took the splint off straightaway. The pain eased quite a lot and by mid-afternoon I felt able to tackle the crutches, with about three laps around the ground floor. My arms felt tired and the rocking forward and stepping on the good leg didn't come very easily.

By the time I had done the three laps I really was ready to stop, which is far from encouraging. I just hope that persevering will build up the strength and stamina!

A little later I did 20 repeats of the leaning presses using the crutches, which I managed fairly comfortably.

While doing the exercises I felt the small of my back every time the spine was fully flexed, and was concerned to find a flat spot where the concave curve is when I stand straight. So my hope that all the joints would be opened up seems to be a little optimistic. Even sitting on a chair with my legs well spread and bending my body as far forward as I can the flat spot remains.

### **Thursday 27 August 2015**

Further exploration of my wretched back offered some clarification. I can actually identify the sacrum (the bone above the occyx or tailbone which is formed by the bottom two vertebrae fusing as we reach maturity). From there up are the five lumbar vertebrae between which the anaesthetic must be injected, and I think their position is okay when I flex my spine. I will keep up the exercises...

I did my routine before breakfast again today and was actually able to do the full eight repeats of the 'sloppy pressups', lifting my pelvis off the floor as soon as I felt that my arms could cope and straightening my body. I was able to lower myself back down under complete control. I then did the spinal extension exercise separately.

The really weird thing is that my right shoulder, which has been quite painful in bed and when moved into certain positions, didn't hurt at all during those two high-stress exercises. The human body really is complex – and downright strange!

I am determined to get myself walking well with the crutches before the surgery.

Having just written that, I did a quick walk round our driveway and came back feeling pretty negative. I then announced to Pat that what I really need to do is lose weight, stepped on the scales and found to my horror that I am just a quarter of a pound under 15 stone – just about the heaviest I have ever been. It is not surprising that my wrists – as well as my shoulders – feel the strain when using the crutches.

Building up my strength is obviously important, but I doubt whether I can build it up enough to compensate for the weight it has to manage on the crutches.

Later on today I had what I thought might be a brainwave use the wheeled Zimmer frame for exercising the arm and shoulder muscles. I fetched it from the summer-house at the bottom of the garden and extended the legs fully. However, I was disappointed to find that I couldn't lift myself on my arm muscles. However, I did find that I could lift myself onto tiptoes, and it was obvious that my arms were taking most of the weight, so maybe I will soon be able to lift my feet off the ground completely.

The leaning presses I was trying with the crutches work far better with the frame, and using it in lieu of the crutches provides a more stable platform for one-legged walking, which I hope will develop strength and control for using the crutches.

My first attempt at getting out of the front door and down the step went fairly well. Getting back in was a little more difficult, but I managed. Provided the surgery doesn't take too much out of me, I think that when I come home from the hospital I will be

able to get into the house more easily than last time – no falling backwards onto the step and rowing myself down the hall on my bum!

At the moment I need to get my right shoulder rested and pain-free. The door outing, on top of everything else, has left it rather sore!

3pm To complete the day's antics, I have just strapped the iWALK on, managing to put it on while sitting on a chair, and I could stand up fairly easily. I then took a little tour of the ground floor. I didn't try walking no-hands initially, but I only used the minimum necessary support from walls, doors, dado rails, tables, chairs etc. I already felt more confident than I did the last time I tried the device. I even.

Having written the above, I took off again and managed the length of the hall, a lap of the kitchen and back along the hall hardly touching anything at all for balance. So pleased was I that I repeated the whole thing again, and popped into the sitting-room to show Pat (though not yet willing to walk across the room without something to grab) before turning neatly into the study and plonking myself on the chair.

I really can't believe that I have somehow found some confidence when I was so wobbly the last time I tried the iWALK. Maybe it's just the shock of how difficult the crutches and Zimmer are with my weight.

I can't, in all honesty, say that the device is totally comfortable, but then neither is walking with crutches! On the contrary, using the crutches to move my disgraceful 15 stone around isn't comfortable at all, while the iWALK just feels a bit clumsy.

I just hope the hospital don't say it will damage my cast (or my ankle)! It shouldn't, because the foam-lined channel the knee and shin sit in stops two or three inches short of the ankle and the weight is borne on the knee. Of course, if I don't tell them about it, they won't be expressing an opinion. When I mentioned it to Mr Milner (he hadn't heard of it) and explained that it was like a knee scooter he didn't express any concerns.

It would be good if I could get confident enough with the iWALK that I could demonstrate it to him at the pre-op. I don't see why I shouldn't be up to full efficiency with it after an hour or two of practice.

### **Sunday 30 August 2015**

On Friday afternoon, we went up to Tickhill to our great new butcher. I can't remember much else about the day except that I have been getting increasingly worried about my right shoulder – that will teach me to skip diary updates.

On the way home we stopped at Tesco's phone shop to get Pat's silly little Samsung upgraded to something a bit more powerful. She now has a Galaxy at least as powerful as mine and with Androis 5.1.1. I am jealous, because mine only has version 4.3.2!

I then spent most of the afternoon getting Pat's email and other stuff working on the phone.

Yesterday we went into town to collect our repaired glasses from the optician, and then to Sainsbury's for a planned small shop that turned out to be quite a big one.

In the afternoon I put on my moutain boots with the splint and cut the grass. By the time I had finished I was wishing I had not kept the splint on with the boot, because the outside of the ankle felt very sore. However, it recovered quickly when I switched to trainers without the splint and I was able to do some garden work with Pat. This included cutting two slim treetrunks off at ground level, which was fine execept that I had forgotten how hard it is for me to get up off the floor. Getting my hands on a bit of rockery gave me just enough purchase to lever myself back onto my feet.

I think I have got a touch of amnesia. The activities listed are what we did but not necessarily on the stated days! I must make sure I update this diary every day.

I have just done some presses on the zimmer frame followed by a short walk with that and another with the crutches. Looking analytically at what I do, it is clear that the 'good' leg does very little work, with the arms taking all the strain. In spite of this, my shoulder has felt quite a lot better today (maybe just thanks to timely dosing with paracetamol) and stood up to this activity quite well.

At some point – I think on Thursday – I decided to start eating less and to cut down on the wine. I had just a peach for my lunch on Friday and felt quite comfortable until dinnertime. I ate slightly more yesterday but also had just a peach today. I have stopped having my Lotus biscuit with morning coffee and the much-more-damaging Ringtons' triple chocolate biscuit with the 4pm tea. Every little should help...

The good news is that the ankle was feeling really good when I got up this morning. I put the splint on with the trainers, and it was only after I reached the front gate, on the way to buy milk and the Sunday paper, that I realised I had not brought a crutch. I carried on anyway, and even with a bag containing two four-pint bottles of semi-skimmed I managed to get back without any significant discomfort. The ankle has continued to feel reasonably comfortable in spite of the little exercises described above.

I had carefully planned a programme for tomorrow, starting with a haircut, buying some screenwash additive and visiting the post office, when I remembered that it is a bank holiday. What I must do tomorrow is get started on a serious programme with the zimmer, the crutches and the iWALK and – once started – stick with it.

I need to set myself some distance targets on the zimmer and the crutches and build up steadily. And I need to get fully confident on the iWALK, building up the distances I walk on that, too.

While I have established (above) that the good leg doesn't do much work with the walking aids, it will have plenty to do when getting up off chairs, manoeuvring between the loo and the bidet (maybe), getting in and out of the bath etc. The right ankle, although it is the one Mr Milner wanted to fuse first, gives me no real trouble, but the knee still causes some concern. I need to pull forward with my arms when walking up steps and, although there seems to have been a gradual improvement, I need to take some of my weight on a hand when stepping down I have noticed that I am letting the knee bend more before applying some support, but I am not confident to use it naturally. So I need some exercises to build strength and confidence.

Finally, I really need to work on spinal flexing before I see Mr Milner next week and ram home the message that I *really* don't want a general anaesthetic.

## **Monday 31 August 2015**

Yesterday Alistair, Julie and their lovely boys told us that they would like to visit us today, so Pat has gone off early for her visit to Anton and I have been experimenting with the iWALK.

I think I have the straps sorted now so that the picturesquely named 'donning and doffing buckle' slackens the strap enough for me to unhook it but tightens it enough so that I don't have to mess with the main adjustment buckle. This means that getting the device on and off will be a lot quicker than they have been.

I have walked around the house quite a bit, but I still don't feel confident to move out of reach of something grab-able for support. Maybe I should try carrying one or both crutches for a while until I really believe that I don't need them.

I have also watched the instructional videos again and solved the one remaining mystery the fact that the calf strap can be moved backwards and forwards. The advice is to keep it as far back as possible but to move it forward if a cast or boot requires this.

I have adjusted the knee-platform height upwards by one notch (only one more available now) and need to experiment with this to find my most comfortable setting. I don't want the 'good' knee to be bent too far as I walk, as this will be very tiring.

My right shoulder has been giving me quite a lot of grief both in bed (last night was a five-pee one, so I was awake quite a lot) and out, yet it tolerated the whole before-breakfast workout – even the 'sloppy pressups', of which, with some effort, I managed eight again. This is the shoulder I damaged when I slipped on ice a few years ago, and which still has a click when moved certain ways. Oddly, it doesn't seem to mind the pressure of using the zimmer or crutches, which is a great relief.

Short excursions on the crutches and the zimmer convinced me yet again that the iWALK has to be the default walking aid for my rehab. With my weight both are just too exhausting. Of the two, I feel safer on the zimmer, so when I have to get from bed to the bathroom and back that will be the choice. However, I intend to use the bottle for night-time pees, and to have a larger bottle (a recycled four-litre milk bottle) in the bedroom to empty it into if it gets too full – I remember all-too-vividly the nocturnal trips in the wheelchair to empty the bottle after the last surgery!

## **Tuesday 1 September 2015**

The ankle continues to behave well, in spite of running around dealing with the grandkids yesterday, but the shoulder has been a real worry overnight. So I went ahead and did the exercises before breakfast this morning and to my amazement it actually feels a lot better. Not painless, but less painful to move than when I got up. The one movement that really hurts is reaching across my chest with the right arm.

I put the splint on for a 60-minute outing, mixing some shopping with a haircut. The shoulder didn't exactly improve my driving but otherwise everything went fine.

Through the day the shoulder seems to have gone through various phases, the worst with pretty extreme pain. The arm feels weak and I certainly haven't felt like working with the zimmer or the crutches – so much for good resolutions.

The ankle got a little sore early in the afternoon but with a little walking around it eased.

I did do a few minutes on the iWALK, trying to use a crutch in the right hand for balance as I suggested yesterday, but it didn't seem to help much. The device didn't feel very comfortable, so I wasn't walking at my best and did a lot of grabbing at dado rails and walls.

It is one week to my pre-op assessment, and I would like to be able to tell the team that I am working well with crutches and the zimmer – and, if possible, the iWALK.

## **Wednesday 2 September 2015**

I woke for a pee at 6:30am this morning and found that my right arm, which had been quite comfortable as long as I stayed in my usual sleeping position, was virtually unusable. Any attempt to move it gave me a blast of pain. I tried to do some gentle basic exercises on the way back to bed, feeling some relief, and took two paracetamol. I also tried massaging the deltoid muscles and found a thin ropy strand that was very tender but felt better after some pretty rough treatment from my thumb. I resumed my favourite sleeping position and managed to relax but not to get back to sleep, instead brooding on the implications of what had happened.

The arm and shoulder began hurting as soon as I started moving at 7:50am, and I had quite a struggle making a pot of tea and getting on and off the loo and the bidet. However, as soon as I started the neck exercises the pain began to ease, and to my amazement I was able to do most of the shoulder exercises only the one that brings the arm across the chest was a bit of a struggle. I was even able to complete the floor exercises for my back – though I did omit the sloppy pressups!

While waiting for Pat to come down to breakfast, I managed to set the table and prepare for a new pot of tea. I got through breakfast and its normal aftermath without difficulty, but as soon as I sat down in my recliner to drink my tea I began to feel the arm seizing up.

I needed to go into town to get the Autumn/Spring component of our four seasons duvet laundered, and I had to short list of stuff to get from Wilkinsons. The first job was to wrestle the reluctant quilt into a large carrier-bag.

Before going out I got our hefty ironing board down off its hooks and into the conservatory for Pat – something I expected to find very difficult but didn't.

Then I drove into town with the arm and shoulder feeling pretty good (yesterday's drive to the hairdresser had been less easy, needing the invention of some slightly new steering moves). I had quite a long walk tracking down a dry-cleaner (Johnsons' shop boasting a poster to say it had moved to Chesterfield in March, despite the website saying it was still open and the phone-number still being active), got rid of the quilt and did a full lap of Wilko's before going home for coffee.

By the time we had drunk this, the arm was beginning to feel a bit restless, so I decided to give our Sebo vacuum-cleaner a much-needed service. This entailed getting the heavy machine up on the kitchen table (having had a long reach for some newspaper in the recycling bin to protect the table-cloth) and lifting it down again for a road test. I now know how to get the brush-roller out – something that had eluded me previously – and the machine now has a new bag, two new filters, a clean brush-roller, and appears to be performing perfectly.

Finally, before one of my new reformed lunches – a cup of tea and a large pear – I brought in the green bin (the smelly one for stuff destined for landfill) and hosed it out. This was a long-overdue job, so I got Brownie points for remembering!

It is a long time since I have had such a busy morning, and the activity really seems to have paid off.

I am writing this at 2:25pm and, having had lunch and a bit of a read I am still amazed at how much better the scary shoulder feels. I am always banging on about exercise being the only treatment for joint pain, but this is extraordinary. I have no idea what is wrong with the shoulder – joint or muscle? - but it has responded spectacularly to Marsden's Magic Exercises!

I have decided to lay off the zimmer and crutches today, because along with the sloppy pressups they may be at the root of this problem, but I must have another go with the iWALK.

2:45pm I have just fitted the iWALK while sitting and then walked for between five and ten minutes, several laps up and down the hall and round the kitchen with my hands hardly touching anything at all. The device still feels heavy and clumsy, but there is no question that I am managing it better. This should surely give me the confidence to start walking away from anything I can grab, because I haven't lost my balance once.

## Friday 3 September 2015

The shoulder was far more comfortable while reading yesterday afternoon and while watching TV through the evening. At bedtime I realised that I had taken my last dose of paracetamol at breakfast time, and as far as I can recall I didn't take any at bedtime.

It was comfortable through the night and during my early-morning snooze time. I did a few gentle mobilising exercises when I got up to pee at 6:30am and, although it was not totally pain-free it was no real trouble.

I did the exercise routine before breakfast, adding in a new one to replace the swinging of the arms together across the chest, which the shoulder really doesn't like working on arm at a time I reached across to grasp the opposite shoulder, reaching as far down the back as possible. This was workable, so I will stick with it.

The shoulder was aching, but bearably, by breakfast time, so I took a dose of paracetamol.

10am I have just taken the hint from yesterday's last paragraph. After doing my usual lap from the study to the front door, from there to a full lap of the kitchen and back to the front door twice, on the third I turned left into our long sitting-room and walked quite confidently from one end to the other, with very little opportunity to grab anything. The second time, after a brief sit down, I felt that I was walking smoothly and confidently.

This is a real breakthrough for me. I really feel now that the iWALK is going to be a major player in my rehab rather than an expensive failure.

After writing that, I have just done about five laps from one end of the sitting-room and back again, and by the time I had finished these I was managing the u-turns, keeping the iWALK on one spot and walking round it, really well.

I don't think I am really relaxing with the device yet, though. I feel quite out-of-breath after a few minutes.

I have just done a couple more laps of the sitting-room, concentrating on standing straight up, looking ahead and taking long strides – much better! On this one I moved the calf strap further up my leg to see if I would be able to get it further from the ankle, and it still felt fine.

Would you believe that this morning I was actually considering using the iWALK as an aid with the crutches, to take the weight off my arms, rather than as a standalone (!) solution?

That was a pretty demanding half-hour or so – for some reason (stress?) I now have a bit of a headache. I will have another go before lunch and two or three this afternoon. It is probably a bit soon to think about going outside and tackling doorsteps, but it would be interesting to see if I can carry a tray...

I have noticed that my right (good) leg is slightly bent while walking with the iWALK. There is only one more pair of holes, but perhaps I should try using those.

Interestingly, with all this excitement plus the pretty overwhelming problem with the shoulder, I have almost forgotten the poor left ankle. This has actually behaved quite well this week, with no serious pain at all. So much so that, during my early morning musings, I was asking myself whether I ought to put the ankle surgery on hold until the rest of me is working better!

My 'two or three' goes planned for this afternoon got slightly hampered by the need to shop for ingredients for meals to be served at Alistair and Julie's tomorrow. We are doing another grandson-sitting day so Julie can help Alistair to catch up on his lost word days. Happily he seems to have sorted his own medication out and is back up

to speed, but the whole-house job he is doing has fallen badly behind. The boys will be back at school on Tuesday so Julie will be able to manage her own time.

Still, I managed a ten-minute iWALK session just before 5pm and everything felt well under control. I even tried the small step down into the conservatory, admittedly holding on to the door frame, and that was okay.

Having mastered putting the thing on while sitting, I have now sorted out a routine for the straps. I slacken the main adjustment buckles as well as the 'donning and doffing' ones, and adjust the main ones while sitting. Then I stand, leaning against something, and pull up the donners and doffers. I also find it easier to slacken the straps if I want to sit down before doffing.

One unhappy thought was triggered by reading an information sheet on ankle fusion, which reminded me that you start with a plaster back-slab – an open-fronted cast like the one we had all the trouble with because that silly nurse didn't fasten the bandages properly. I doubt if I will be allowed to rest weight – even just the weight of the lower leg and the cast – on the front of my shin to use the iWALK until the back-slab is replaced by a proper fibreglass cast. This will have to be checked with Mr Milner on Tuesday.

### **Sunday 6 September 2015**

Yesterday morning Pat and I went to Asda to get some bits which might be a little beyond the Co-op but probably didn't need a slightly longer journey to Sainsbury's. The key one was chicken wings which, with home-made wedges, we have decided make a much better Friday (or in this case Saturday) dinner than either fish-and-chips or frozen scampi and chips, neither of which are reincarnated terribly well by 20 minutes in the oven. We both agree that the wing is unquestionably the tastiest bit of the chicken and roasts beautifully in about 45 minutes.

That, the ensuing cooking and the Italian Grand Prix qualifying pretty well put an end to the day.

The ankle was behaving very well but the right shoulder, which didn't feel too bad when I got up, was pretty hellish. However, it seemed happier in bed and – unlike the bladder – didn't interfere with my sleep at all.

Both the ankle and the shoulder felt good this morning too. I walked to the shop for the paper and milk without a crutch but with the splint on. Carrying the bag in my right hand (the one on the opposite side to the bad ankle but with the dodgy shoulder) was painless, but the shoulder soon got worse. It actually made it difficult and painful to lift a spoonful of porridge to my mouth. It hasn't been too bad while sitting down to read *The Observer* on the Kindle, but isn't enjoying typing this very much.

The ankle doesn't mind at all.

Oddly (very!) the shoulder didn't protest at all when I tried doing some presses on the zimmer frame. The latest version of this exercise is to stand inside the frame and press until I am standing on tip-toe, with as little assistance from the leg muscles as possible.

Apart from cooking dinner this evening and watching the Grand Prix, this is going to be a lazy day. I need to keep to the exercise routine tomorrow and brace myself for getting up at about 6am on Tuesday for my pre-op appointment in Derby at 8am.

(I just checked back to last September and found that we left home at 5:30am on the day of the operation. I won't get a letter for that until after Tuesday, but I am assuming that my appointment will be at the same time on the 30<sup>th</sup>.)

As expected, the rest of the day was uneventful and lazy.

## Monday 7 September 2015

I awoke for a pee at 5:30am and then had a fairly restless couple of hours mulling over all my anxieties. The shoulder was uncomfortable rather than painful in bed and I know I dropped off a couple of times before getting up on the dot of 7:50am – in time to get dressed and make a pot of tea before the 8 o'clock news on Radio4. While listening, I did the standing and sitting components of my normal exercise routine (no sloppy press-ups, though), and after I had finished my tea I went through to do the floor stuff. Finally I did 16 presses on the zimmer frame.

After breakfast I changed the fitted sheets and pillowcases on our beds and took my Mum's old AEG vacuum-cleaner round the bedroom and *en-suite*. It's what they used to call a cylinder machine (though it isn't remotely cylindrical) so I had to scrub the carpet with the pipe and nozzle on the end of the hose. If anything was going to aggravate the shoulder it would be this, but it didn't. It has been remarkably trouble-free until recently, after doing a practice exit and entry through the front door on the zimmer (not easy, but manageable and no pain) and had been typing for a few minutes. It is a sort of repetitive strain thing rather than a stress thing – really weird.

The entry and exit were reassuring. I probably won't be going out much in the first couple of weeks after the operation, but at least I know that, on my return from the hospital, I'll be able to get from the car to the door, up the step, over the door-frame and into the house without having to fall over and slide on my bum! Also, if we do go out, I'll be able to get out to the car.

I would like to be able to do these manoeuvres smoothly, just lifting the good foot rather than hopping violently as I do at the moment, so I'm going to keep up the presses for strength and the exits and entries five days a week until operation time.

Oh yes – the ankle. I'd forgotten that because it has behaved really well all morning apart from some intermittent soreness up the shin-bone. I hope that isn't the fracture opening up.

Next, the crutches. I managed to use them at the front door, getting outside *almost* without touching the bad foot down, walked up the slope to the gate and back down, then *almost* getting inside without a touchdown. The 'almost' is critical, because if I perform as badly as that after surgery I could undo all Mr Milner's hard work.

The zimmer is definitely favourite for getting through doors and up and down steps at present. The strain on the arms using both devices is pretty bad. My nearly-fifteen-stone weight is really a liability. I have just over three weeks until the operation, in which I need to build strength and, if possible, lose some weight.

I'm not clear exactly why the demand on the arms is so great when they are locked out straight when bearing my weight. I think there must be something wrong with my technique. Having had another go I wonder whether I am making this hard by not relaxing. I walked through to the kitchen with the crutches and it didn't feel too bad this time.

Earlier, I tried getting up one-legged from a kitchen chair using one hand on the table and one on the crutches in the H-formation I remember being taught years ago. This was hopeless, but when I sat facing the table and use both hands on that it worked much better.

I have noticed very recently that the performance of my right knee when going up and down stairs has improved recently. I have been in the habit of pulling myself forward with my hands as I lift on the knee because, somehow, I can't centre my weight on it as I do on the left one, and I have needed a lot of support going down but recently rather less. This knee has been dodgy for years – Mr Milner offered to recommend 'a good knee man' a year or two ago – but it does seem to be improving with the extra work it gets supporting the left ankle. I need to keep exercising this,



too, as the right leg is going to be busy in the first six weeks after the left ankle fusion.

Having written the last paragraph I have just tried getting up our spiral stairs without holding anything. The left leg works well. I can lift myself on the right, but I tend to need my hands – or at least an elbow – to stop myself falling backwards once I have straightened the right leg. I transferred my efforts to the step outside the back door, which has a rise of 220mm, and actually managed to get up on the right leg, which was good because I recorded my failure to do this in July 2014, before the last operation. However, bizarrely, there was pain in the left ankle! I think I must be kicking off unconsciously with the left foot. I just tried again and achieved a straight, controlled, no-hands lift. The discomfort in the left ankle seems to come from it landing on the step rather hard after the right one has arrived.

So mixed news today. The zimmer will get me out to the car and back indoors fairly reliably. I can walk with the crutches reasonably well but the front door is probably a step too far. And the right knee's performance on stairs has improved considerably.

To end the morning's antics I have just put on the iWALK, which I am still using fairly comfortably – a lot more so than the zimmer or the crutches! - and managed to get down the kitchen step and back up again. I needed to hold onto the sides of the doorway, but that is what I expected – it ties in with the maker's instructions which say one should be sure to hold onto the banisters when going up or down stairs.

The one slight concern was a little discomfort around the lower shin, which could indicate that the device won't work very well with a cast. Over to Mr Milner...

This afternoon we went to Sainsbury's to buy foodie stuff for grandson Barney to take to his university accommodation. The shoulder obviously didn't enjoy this, because when I was drinking a mug of tea after we got back I had to change hands to lift my drink.

I am wondering if this is some sort of repetitive stress effect. Something as simple as spooning porridge into my mouth becomes really painful after I have been doing it for a little while, even after a period with no shoulder pain at all. Then I do a variety of things with the arm, even quite extreme movements, and the pain goes away.

Later on I decided to try the crutches again, and I couldn't manage at all – the pain was too great.

## **Tuesday 8 September 2015**

After a reasonably early night – I hit the pillow not long after 10:30pm and got off to sleep very quickly – and only two visits to the loo, my phone woke me at 5:45am and we were off to Derby by 6:30am. Plenty of time, we thought, even with the M1 restricted to 50mph for the whole of our route from junction 30 to junction 28. But the early rush-hour traffic on the A38 slowed us badly, and we only got parked at the hospital about 10 minutes before my 8am appointment. I had to stop in the gents to fill a specimen bottle because I only noticed that this was required *after* I had had my tactical tiddle before departure! I had forgotten what a long walk it was from car park 2 to the Trauma and Orthopaedic Assessment Unit, but we got to reception about two minutes after eight.

The long, tedious and repetitive process took just on two hours, with sessions with two nurses, one with Mr Milner's junior doctor – a totally anglicised and very pleasant young Muslim lady whose first name was Islam – and one with the man himself. All the tests seemed fine, and I signed the consent form without a moment's hesitation.

The truly wonderful news is that he had a look at the picture I'd printed for him of the iWALK and saw no reason why I shouldn't use it straight after the operation. To my surprise, he actually thought it might be more comfortable with the back-slab than

with the full cast, and his only concern was that my shin might suffer some discomfort. He asked me to bring it in on Operation Day so that the physios could assess it, but thought it looked excellent. What a relief!

I will carry on working with the crutches – shoulders permitting – but my rehabilitation is now looking a whole lot less daunting.

He was also quite happy for me to have a spinal and a behind-the-knee nerve block if the anaesthetist can find his way between my vertebrae, so the spinal mobilising exercises will continue to be a high priority.

I had to call in for two x-rays on the ankle before leaving. This was quite a long walk, as the x-ray suite is close to the exit at the end where we went in. I didn't bother to put the splint back on before leaving. The walk was made even longer by Pat's realisation that I must have left my favourite old M&S navy cotton sweater in the assessment room. We had to trek back for it and then all the way back to car park 2. Fortunately there is a small Costa's café by the exit, so we paused for a much-needed capuccino and a sticky bun.

While putting my sock back on after the x-rays I noticed that the ankle looked horrendously swollen and deformed, so before leaving the table I discreetly put the splint back on.

We had a much easier drive home, arriving just after midday.

Things are looking good!

Around lunchtime, while Pat was shopping, I put the iWALK on and tried various manoeuvres, including standing still to make a pot of tea, and I concluded that the iWALK leg needed to be longer. There was only one pair of holes left, but they did what was needed I could stand still far more comfortably. I sat down at the kitchen table and then tried to get up. I hadn't had much trouble in the study, but the slippery kitchen floor tiles were something else. I managed in the end, though, and then went to sit down in the sitting-room for a while. My recliner is much lower than a kitchen chair but I managed to lever myself up onto the arm and then try to find a position where the iWALK foot could get a grip on the carpet. I managed that and got back on my feet without too much difficulty. I need to do plenty of this before I have to convince the physios...

At about 6pm I remembered that I hadn't done either my early-morning in-bed exercises or the neck-shoulder-back ones I usually do before breakfast.

I have been doing the side-bends in a seated position since the surgery last September because my legs just didn't feel strong and steady enough to do them standing as I have done for years – there was a tremor in my knees. Sometime this week I thought the legs felt stronger and tried just a couple of careful side-bends which seemed to work well. So this afternoon I tried the full set standing – on a tiled floor rather than a carpet for maximum stability – and managed really well. More progress – I really seem to be getting more and more control of my body back.

### **Wednesday 9 September 2015**

Ironically, I woke this morning for a pee at exactly 5:45am – the time the alarm woke us yesterday. I had a couple of hours of restless cat-napping and got up on schedule at 7:45am, managing to make tea, put the splint on my very ugly-looking ankle, set up for breakfast and do the early-morning exercises (with standing side-bends). Because the shoulder had been fairly comfortable overnight I did ten presses on the zimmer to finish off – no pain at the time but fairly uncomfortable typing this.

After breakfast I put the iWALK on and, after a walk round the kitchen, went out of the front door and walked up the sloping drive. Somehow I lost my balance and fell

backwards, managing not to hurt anything – or, more important, not to attract Pat's attention! The walking had felt awkward, and I was convinced that I had the iWALK leg too long. I should have checked this by walking around the house a bit more and adjusted it before going out. The conclusion is that the shorter leg is a little less comfortable standing still and doing stuff, but much better for walking.

I shortened the leg by 25mm and found walking much better. Then I managed to sit down on the bed in the study and somehow get myself back upright. Going down the small front step was difficult on the dodgy knee but I managed it and did a couple of short walks round the driveway. After coming back in – the step was much easier going up – I sat on the bed again and, after a bit of experimentation, managed to get up again. This is going to be important on discharge day I have to convince the physios that I can cope of they might not let me out! Whether my technique will have improved enough for me to walk all the way out of the hospital is another question altogether! I have 20 days in which to find out...

A slightly dodgy zimmer-trip out of the front door and back in convinced me that I would be able to manage the move from the house to the car and back again – just! A lap from the study, round the kitchen and back to the study on the crutches finished this morning's practice. Definitely. A couple of uncontrolled touches with the bad foot showed that I had done a little too much!

This was confirmed by my arms and shoulders, but not with the nasty pain that has dogged me lately they were aching with the stress and fatigue of honest toil. Maybe the other thing is finally fading and is *not* aggravated by effort.

### **Friday 11 September 2015**

Yesterday morning I went into town to do a small amount of shopping, and by the time I got back to the car my left ankle was very painful. I had to do a lap of Sainsbury's as well, and even with the trolley to lean on it was fairly miserable. I wondered whether I had over-tightened the splint, so I loosened the straps when I got back to the car.

When I took the splint off at home at was appalled by the sight of my ankle, which looked a bit like a cauliflower but with a very sharp point sticking out far further than I had ever seen it before. This was the external malleolus – the outside 'ankle bone' as I have always called it.

The pain subsided with a little rest, and with the splint on and not too much stress I got through the day without too much grief.

I discovered that the foam lining of the splint had become very compressed and worn, so that the malleolus had been interacting painfully with a rivet in the splint side with very little protection. I found a scrap of high-density foam which I had kept 'just in case', cut out a circle using a 2p piece as a template and PritStuck this on to the foam. This made the device much more comfortable.

I had a very friendly phone-call in the afternoon from an occupational therapist attached to Trauma and Orthopaedic, wanting to check that I had everything under control. I think I convinced her, even reporting my running repair to the splint!

Unusually, I got through the night with just two trips to the loo (it had been five the previous night) and didn't have my usual restless couple of hours in the morning. I came to rather groggily and it took a few minutes before I could work up the enthusiasm to check the time. To my amazement, it was 7:40am, ten minutes from my normal 7:50am rising time – just time to do the ankle and knee exercises. I think the fatigue from the ankle and the shoulder must really have caught up with me.

The cauliflower had shrunk, making the malleolus look even more grotesque. I put the splint on as soon as the kettle was on. I had wanted to do this in the bedroom, but I didn't want to disturb Pat with the sound of ripping Velcro.

Ablutions and the first cup of tea out of the way, I did the neck, shoulder and back exercises. The left leg was a bit wobbly when I did the standing side-bends, but not really painful. The shoulder had felt *nearly* painless yesterday, but it was a little worse this morning. All the widely distributed pain had gone – and still has – leaving just the joint between the shoulder-blade and the collar-bone feeling sore. This is the joint I damaged several years ago, which still clicks when I move it certain ways.

I have been getting rather worried about the use of my right arm. The hand is still shaky and the arm is a little weak when doing things like lifting a large mug of tea to my mouth, but I think it is improving. I am not sure how all this was triggered,, but I suspect the crutches, the zimmer and the sloppy press-ups may have been the culprits.

I skipped all my training stuff yesterday, having probably done too much on Wednesday, so I needed to try some more work today.

I started with a ten-minute wander around the house on the iWALK, once I had got the tangles out of the straps. I put the device on while standing alongside the study desk, so I had some stability, and the took off down the hall, round the kitchen, back into the sitting-room, round the conservatory with a little hop over the bottom of the door-frame, back out to the front door and out onto the drive, back in, down the hall, out of the back door, down the 200mm step, around the patio, back up the step and in, and through to the sitting-room for a trial with my recliner. I had a ten-second sit-down to get my breath back and then managed to lever myself up so that I was sitting on the chair-arm and roll easily onto the iWALK, benefiting from its excellent grip on the carpet. Then off for a sit-down at the kitchen table. I managed to get the iWALK crutch under the table, so I would be able to keep it on while eating. Then I had to get up without the aid of the crutch on the slippery tiles. Sitting square to the table with both hands on the top and my good foot centrally under me, I was able to lift quite easily to get the iWALK crutch vertical.

I wrote this sitting at the desk with the crutch tucked tidily under the desk, and when I had finished I decided to do a quick lap up to the front door, back to the kitchen, round the table and back to the study. I had been wearing the magic device for a full half-hour.

Getting up from the study chair is another unique challenge as it is on casters! I have to swivel left by 45 degrees, dig the crutch-tip into the carpet, lift on the right legs and both hands and swing my weight over the crutch. It sounds complicated, but it works.

Through all this I had no worrying losses of balance. Walking up and down even the very gentle slop of our drive felt a bit strange – which was where I had my tumble the other day – but I managed both quite well.

So a good iWALK session. If I can keep this up until operation day I should be ready for anything – even the dreaded physios!

### **Monday 14 September 2015**

Saturday was an unmemorable day, but yesterday was another grandparenting one. We got to Buxton just on 9am and had a pleasant 'at home' morning with Ewan and Tom, mostly occupied with games on the console. Then in the afternoon we drove the boys to the Little Rascals soft indoor play centre and sat on a squashy settee, taking advantage of the free WiFi, while they ran themselves out of some – but not all – of their steam. We left for home after dinner and got back without incident. My left ankle – in fact the whole foot – was giving me a lot of grief by then. I had really

struggled with Alistair's long flight of shallow stairs. I kept the splint on for the rest of the evening. We wanted to watch the new adaptation of Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* but didn't think we would have the stamina for it, so we went to bed at about 9pm.

I had what felt like a dreadful sleepless night punctuated by five pees (I was convinced that I hadn't slept a wink after 3:35am), but have not been feeling too bad so far (it is now 2:40pm). I managed to get the splint on in the *en-suite* without the ripping sound of Velcro waking Pat.

I did the neck...back routine before breakfast, and we went to see Anton this morning.

After lunch I did a session on the iWALK, trying standing up from the study chair, the study bed, a kitchen chair and my recliner, all of which were achieved with various degrees of difficulty. I also went out through both the front and back doors and had a little wander outside. Then I did one lap from the study, round the kitchen and back again on the crutches, which was less than impressive but I managed it. In spite of all the pain I have been having from the shoulders, walking with the crutches didn't cause too much grief. I finished off with a hop from the study to the front door on the zimmer and got myself out of the door, down the step, a couple of metres to the car, back to the step, up to the door, through the door and back to the study – the minimum requirement for getting from the car to a place of safety when Pat brings me home from the hospital.

Bad news? I got my appointment letter for the op I have to be on the ward by 7:30am on the 30<sup>th</sup>, which means leaving home no later than 0600. At least the traffic should be light!

The rest of the afternoon, up to the tea-break at 4pm, was spent reducing, straining and blending the stock made from two weeks' wings-and-wedges dinners, and then refreshing my sourdough (a little late). The legs and feet stood up very well to an hour or more standing.

## **Tuesday 15 September 2015**

It is 8:30am. Just two weeks and a day from now I will have been at the Royal Derby Hospital for one hour on a 'nil by mouth' regime since 6:30am. Prior to that time, one is encouraged to eat, with a light meal in the late evening (following a heavy one earlier?) and/or small snacks until 2:30am. The plenty to drink, including tea or coffee with a little milk, up to 6:30am. Time is flying by, and I don't seem to be getting as much done with the walking aids as I hoped.

After Sunday night's restlessness, I had a good night in spite of five pees, waking at 7am and getting up at 7:45am. As yesterday, I managed to get the splint on quietly sitting on the loo seat in the *en-suite*. The ankle feels stable but was quite sore around the bottom of the tibia. After the 8am news and a cup of tea I did the usual neck-shoulders-back routine, again without sloppy press-ups. The back seems to be quite mobile, so finger crossed for the spinal anaesthetic! The right shoulder isn't really painful except when I make extreme movements but the arm doesn't work properly in some positions – such as trying to put olive oil in my bunged-up right ear.

I began this morning's mobility work with a lap of the hall and kitchen using the elbow crutches. I'm not quite sure why this is as exhausting as it is, but by the time I got back to the study my co-ordination was beginning to fall apart. The elbows stay locked, so I am not actually having to lift myself on the arms, and I don't hop on the good leg – just swing it through as the crutches begin to tilt forwards – so where is all the effort going, unless it requires a positive effort by the arm, and possibly shoulder, muscles to prevent the arms from collapsing?

Next came a much shorter excursion using the zimmer. This is actually harder work than the crutches but feels a lot more secure. I only went from the study to the front door and back again, but I was able to get a side view of my moves in the hall mirror. The big difference was that with the zimmer the elbows are slightly bent, so I decided to try lowering it one notch. I did this just with the front legs, because the hand-grips are tilted up towards the front, and walking did feel a little easier. The mirror still showed the elbows not quite locked.

The walking action with the zimmer is to push it forward (it has wheels at the front and slippery crutch-tips at the back), then lean on the arms and swing the leg through – again, no hopping so very little effort from the good leg.

I anticipate using the zimmer mainly for getting in and out of the front door and to and from the car. It might be a competitor for getting to the bathroom at night, but I intend to use the bottle when I am in bed, with a 4-pint milk bottle to empty it into if needed. Managing all that was fairly easy with the wheelchair but will be less so with the walking aids. Besides, it will be interesting to be able to keep an eye on how much I pee.

I had a few minutes on the iWALK before coffee, making a deliberate effort to walk more quickly and positively across the sitting-room where there is nothing to grab onto. The result was quite pleasing. iWALKing is still fairly hard work, but nowhere near as hard as using crutches or the zimmer.

I need to work on getting up from chairs and the bed, building strength in the right knee and the arms. It is not too bad when sitting at the desk or table, where I can get a good push-up on both hands. I think I ought to try to get up one-legged every time.

It was very wet outside this morning, so I didn't go outside with any of the aids until towards lunchtime, when I had a go at the front door on the zimmer. Getting out was fine, but lowering the front legs by a mere 25mm made the difference between succeeding in hopping up the step and failing dismally. By the time I had raised them again it started raining very hard.

With the sun shining brightly at 1pm I iWALKed out of the front door and tried getting into the passenger seat of the car. By moving the seat as far back as it would go and moving as far to the right as possible, I *almost* got the tip of the leg in, but not quite. Maybe if I do a few more contortions, as I did when someone parked too close to our car and I had to get in from the passenger side, I might just manage it. Or not. However, I had no trouble at all standing up from the passenger seat.

When I looked back at the passenger space I realised that there was no way I could sit in the car with the iWALK on, because the dashboard, containing the glove compartment, rolls away to a much lower level than my knees, completely blocking the space the crutch-tip would need!

Before that I walked right round the kitchen table with a mug full of water on a tray and didn't spill a drop. So when Pat goes out, leaving me alone, I won't have to stay in the kitchen to drink my coffee.

The degree of freedom I will have compared with previous post-op periods will be phenomenal. I can't remember very well how I coped before, after the ankle replacement and the two operations on my quadriceps tendon, the second in a whole-leg cast. I do know I got very frustrated. The rented wheelchair saved my bacon a year ago, but left me shockingly unfit.

I am finding the device's straps a bit fiddly and the T-slot fixings are rather stiff to set and release. I rubbed a little wax onto the little ridges that allow the fittings to pop on and off, but I don't think that achieved much..

I have just re-read the account of the original ankle-replacement operation on the 9 March 2006, and I can't believe that I was walking on the leg in just a month and that I had a boot I could remove for sleeping and washing and was back in an ordinary shoe in just a month. Amazing!

### **Wednesday 16 September 2015**

I overslept by a few minutes this morning, which was quite pleasant – it leant that I hadn't been tossing and turning for a couple of hours waiting for time to get up. I did feel quite groggy, though, and I have had a bit of a head-ache for the whole morning. I did the exercises before breakfast and as soon as I had finished my cup of tea I went off to Sainsbury's with a fairly long shopping list – my daughter Sarah is visiting on Sunday and we had decided to do a more-or-less Greek Sunday lunch.

After coffee I put on the iWALK and did the first really purposeful practice session, going out to the garage, collecting two 2kg bags of home-grown plums from the freezer and bringing them back to the kitchen. Then I went out to the car to get the crutch which I had left in the boot after shopping. It felt good to actually be *doing* something – and managing – rather than just going through the motions. I finished by sitting down in the kitchen and getting off the chair, and then sitting in my recliner and getting up off that.

I will do some more stuff on the iWALK later, as well as some practice with crutches and zimmer.

One frustration is that the two steps down from the patio to the lawn have no hand-rails. The iWALK instructions say I should always hold onto something when negotiating steps or stairs, but if I can manage these steps I will be able to go right down the garden.

In the middle of the afternoon I went out of the front door and back in twice using the zimmer. Hopping up the front step is still difficult, but I am managing it – just. This was followed by a full lap from the front door, down the hall, round the kitchen table and back to the start. This is hard work too. Thank Heaven for the iWALK, which enables me to do all this with a fraction of the effort required by the other two aids.

I have introduced another new exercise in my attempt to avoid a general anaesthetic I sit on a chair with my legs well separated and lean down between them to touch the floor with both hands. Feeling my back while I am at full bend, it is difficult to be sure how the lower back is bending. I think most of the lumbar vertebrae are moving independently.

### **Thursday 17 September 2015**

This morning was forecast to be dry and sunny, so we decided to tackle a job which I have been rather dreading – barrowing the logs we had delivered a week or so ago round to the back of the house and stacking them in the wood-shed. Pat said she would stack if I could get the wood round.

First I had to get six plastic garden chairs out of the shed and down to garden to their winter quarters on the summer-house veranda.

I decided on maximum ankle protection on both sides, which meant wearing my Scarpa Asolo mountain boots, the nearest I have to removable plaster casts. Last time I cut the grass I wore them with the splint, but this caused severe pain to the outside of the left ankle, so this time I put the white ProSport supports on both ankles, followed by my regular long socks and the still-wonderful Anapurna hiking socks dating from my first visit to Scotland in the early seventies. Tightly laced into this lot, the ankles felt pretty stable, and I was able to get all the wood round in about six barrow-loads. Pat did a great stacking job, almost keeping up with my deliveries, and between us we had the job done by about 10:15am. The ankle did protest a little,

but not as much as I had feared. I am writing this at 12:15pm and, secure in its splint and the Reebok trainers, it feels better than it often does after a more routine morning.

This of course stopped me doing any training with crutches or zimmer, and Pat is now having her hair done in the kitchen, so I will have to postpone this until after lunch. However, there was nothing stopping me from using the iWALK. I decided to try getting out to the patio through the conservatory doors, which entails getting past the coffee table which live just inside them. This was probably a step too far – a real struggle – and afterwards I was a bit wobbly walking around outside. Fortunately getting back inside by the same route was marginally easier. I did a bit more wandering around the house and then went out of the front door with no real difficulty, though I was still a little wobbly walking – probably fatigue from all the bending and barrow work. Finally I did a lap of the sitting-room, sitting on the recliner and lifting myself off it, to the arm and then the window-sill with very little difficulty. Then back to the study and off with the straps.

At about 1:15pm I went upstairs to our bedroom for my wallet – and found out just how much the morning's work had taken out of my legs, back and arms! It is no surprise that my iWALKing was a bit sub-standard.

I finally got round to doing some crutch and zimmer work at about 5pm. I managed to get out of the front door using the zimmer and to get back in again – much more difficult because of the 100mm-plus step. I carried the zimmer back out and came in again, a bit raggedly. My arms and shoulders were definitely showing signs of weariness.

Then I used the crutches to go from the study to the front door, turn round and go back down the hall to the kitchen, once round the table and back to the study. Very hard work.

Earlier I had ordered another bag of logs, to be delivered either tomorrow (Friday) or at the beginning of next week. I just hope the weather will let us get these under cover before I go for the operation.

I also booked us a lunch at Fischer's Baslow Hall next Tuesday. This is the hotel-restaurant where we got married ten years ago, for which Sarah had bought us a £50 voucher for Christmas. Our last fling before surgery.

## **Friday 18 September 2015**

I slept quite well last night after the exertions with the logs (the muscles are still a bit sore), despite four trips to the loo and did the early-morning exercise routine before breakfast.

I am seeing the urologist on Monday, so I transcribed my scribbled pee-log into a spreadsheet. Then I extracted the basic data from the sheet I did for the GP between March and August last year into a print area, leaving out the more obsessive statistical analysis. The two printouts show how much the Tamsulosin improved things last year and how much worse they are since the urinary disaster last September.

My conclusion is that the Tamsulosin helped with the problem caused by prostate enlargement but the post-anaesthesia problem last year did some permanent damage.

Having prepared my evidence, I went out with the zimmer and did four entries through the front door and a couple of exits. Lowering the frame a little seems to have helped, but I also think the difficulty is to do with confidence – convincing myself that I can hop up the step and over the door-frame without the danger of putting the bad foot down.



I spent the time until lunch grilling red, yellow and green peppers and griddling sliced aubergines for Sarah's visit on Sunday. When I got back to the computer it seemed dead, but when I tipped the monitor forward, pulled out its mains plug and then plugged it in again everything returned to normal!

After an hour or so searching for photographs of my daughter Sarah for Pat, I decided it was time for a stroll on the iWALK – out of the front door, a lap around our drive area, back inside to explore the conservatory, then to the kitchen and out onto the patio. Finally back inside.

I have been wondering for some time if I have the leg set a little too long, so I shortened it by the smallest possible amount and had another walk around the house. I definitely felt more balanced. I will keep it like this for a while and see if the improvement is sustained. Interestingly, although the holes are spaced 25mm apart, there seem to be more than one set of locking buttons, so I think maybe the length can be adjusted by amounts less than 25mm and that this is what I have inadvertently done.

At around 5:15pm I remembered that I had planned to cut the grass once it had all had the benefit of some sunshine. The sky had been cloudy for most of the afternoon, so this requirement had not been met, but I struggled into my boots – with a ProSport support on the bad ankle – and managed to do the job without too much discomfort. I was relieved to finish, though.

When I was taking the boots off I had a dramatic pain attack at the top of the left instep – really sharp pain. This subsided once I had the ProSport off and the splint back on, but the ankle felt quite battered for the rest of the evening.

### **Saturday 19 September 2015**

I enjoyed a weekend lie-in until just after 8:30am this morning, having had a decent sleep. The ankle was quite achy while I was catnapping my way to getting up. We were planning on going to Retford Farmers' Market, so as soon as Pat was fully awake I had a shower. I need to enjoy as many of these as possible over the next ten days as I won't get a proper stand-up one for at least six weeks after that – just the rather exhausting sit-down jobs in the corner bath downstairs.

It became apparent, while Pat was getting ready, that there was no way she would manage Retford. Her back had seized up very badly and she was in a lot of pain, presumably from a long spell of log-stacking on Thursday and most of yesterday spent working in the garden, much of the time on her hands and knees. I would have to shop locally for the remaining food needed for Sarah's visit tomorrow – the planned lunch has evolved into a Greek-themed meal.

Once tucked up in the splint and trainers, the ankle was fairly comfortable, but my shoulder muscles were quite sore, partly (I am sure) from all the crutch and zommer work I did yesterday and partly from manhandling our big brute of a mower round the lawn.

After breakfast I did a quick visit to Aldi for wine and ice-cream followed by a longer one to Sainsbury's without too much difficulty.

Then, after coffee, I did no less than *three* exits and entrances through the front door using the zimmer, with no break in between and no touchdowns with the bad foot. This was followed immediately by the usual lap on the crutches. I thought I might do two laps end-to-end, but I was quite tired by the end of one.

After lunch I managed to do the two more crutch laps end-to-end, making a total of three for the day so far, and three more in-and-outs at the front front door with the zimmer. Then it was time for the Murrays in the David Cup semi-final.

Interestingly, my shoulders were much less painful after all this. Even the dodgy joint on the right collarbone was less tender. The muscles felt pleasantly tired but fairly comfortable.

After the tennis – a real nailbiter – I went for an iWALK around the patio and the driveway, discovering that the lock on the front door was almost totally jammed. I iWALKed out to the garage, let myself in, picked up a can of WD40 and went back through the house to sort the door out. Then I went back to replace the WD40 and returned to the study. This iWALK covered a fair distance and involved negotiating various steps and getting stuff off and back on a high shelf. Thinking back to my times on crutches and in the wheelchair, this rehab looks like being a lot less disabling and frustrating.

In terms of my training-for-rehab plan, this has been a very constructive day, with successes using all three aids. If I can keep this up until the 29<sup>th</sup>, increasing the workload, I should have very little trouble dealing with the six weeks without weight-bearing on the left leg.

### **Monday 21 September 2015**

Yesterday morning was all about Sarah's visit – a quick trip to the Co-op for fresh baguettes and then non-stop food-prep, so lots of time on our feet. That would explain why my legs felt rather weak and wobbling while doing the standing components of this morning's exercise routine.

I didn't get any time for practising with the zimmer, the crutches or the iWALK yesterday, so today I needed to do plenty of work. Until this weekend I had a urology appointment at the hospital this afternoon, but the called to cancel it because the consultant is off sick. So, with Pat off visiting Anton, I had plenty of time to work with all three aids.

Just before 10am I managed 2½ laps on the crutches – half a lap more than on Friday – but I didn't seem to be able to get the lean-and-swing-through action right. I was taking very small steps and the strain on my arms and shoulders was considerable. When I stopped I was quite out of breath.

It was very wet outside, but I thought I might try the exit-and-entrance routine with the zimmer. I did three sets more-or-less successfully – a couple of the hops were less than perfect – and found that I wasn't leaning as hard as before on the zimmer and the hops were more confident.

Finally it was iWALK time. I had a good walk around the house and then set out to do a little real work in the kitchen. I strained a pan of hot chicken stock into a basin and washed the pan, its lid and the sieve. Then I made myself a cup of coffee to take through to the sitting-room. I decided to be cautious and put a folded j-cloth on the tray. I managed to get the coffee to my chair with only a couple of small slops. I then sat in the recliner, still wearing the iWALK, and watched a recorded episode of *Horizon*. Halfway through this I went through and made a second cup of coffee. While this was heating in the microwave I tipped the drained chicken bones into a carrier-bag and took it out to the dustbin (in the wet and without skidding!). I watched the rest of the programme and then took my cup back to the kitchen. In the course of these manoeuvres I got up off the recliner twice with some difficulty – the second time better than the first. I tipped the stock into a takeaway container and put it in the fridge before washing the basin and tipping the soapy water away. All this interaction with water triggered my restless bladder, so I went to the bathroom and had my first pee while wearing the iWALK. In all, I wore the device for well over an hour and was quite comfortable.

In the course of my kitchen activity I decided that the iWALK leg was a little short for standing still comfortably at the worktop. When I went back to the chair I adjusted it,

confirming my suspicion that the leg has more than one pair of pins, allowing quite a fine degree of adjustment.

So things really are looking good for my six-week spell without weight-bearing on the bad leg. I should be able to occupy myself and make myself useful in ways that have never been possible before. I will be able to continue making my yogurt and sourdough bread and probably cook full meals unaided.

I am finding it quite easy to bend down to low cupboards when using the iWALK, and I even managed to tidy the toilet-mat when I had disturbed it while peeing. The most difficult thing is still getting up from different chairs, but I'm sure I will soon refine my techniques.

At midday I did one more lap on the crutches. The muscles had recovered from the first lot and coped reasonably well, but one lap was enough.

### **Tuesday 22 September 2015**

We are going to Fischer's Baslow Hall, scene of our wedding, for lunch today, thanks to a gift voucher from Sarah.

So I needed to do my essential training early. I had done my regular exercises before breakfast as usual, and straight after eating I did two rather laborious laps with the crutches, almost falling off the sticks at the finish so disappointing after yesterday's triumphs with the iWALK. However, I followed them up with three clean exits-and-entrances on the zimmer, so if for any reason I can't use the iWALK straight after the operation (I envisage sitting sideways with my legs out of the car door, strapping it on and strolling effortlessly in through the front door) I won't have any difficulty getting back into the house.

My right shoulder was quite sore after the morning workout, but strangely it didn't react badly to the crutches.

The trip to Baslow was a nightmare – more idiots on the road than I could believe. We had to phone Fischers and warn them that we would be late.

The lunch was excellent, with the usual excellent service, and afterwards we stopped off at the Chatsworth Farm Shop for a few goodies. I had to change out of my uncomfortable 'posh' shoes into Reeboks to drive the rest of the way home. We needed no more than a light snack and had a thoroughly lazy evening.

### **Wednesday 23 September 2015**

I did my usual exercises before breakfast and went into town afterwards to collect two duvets from the cleaners and pick up a couple of odds and ends.

After coffee I did two laps on the crutches, which felt easier than they had before. I managed to get my leg swinging a little more freely. Planting the crutch tips just two or three inches ahead of the foot and leaning fairly heavily on the hand-grips to tilt the crutches forward before swinging the foot through seems to work well. Having said that, I was still glad to stop after two laps, but with the intention of doing a few more, spaced out through the afternoon.

This was followed by four or five exits-and-entrances with the zimmer – I lost count! Having been a real problem after previous operations, this is now really easy I just lean fairly heavily on the frame and hop with the good leg. Physically this is far less demanding than walking with the crutches – so I decided to do another lap with those.

I did a few minutes of marching around the house on the iWALK before deciding that it felt as if the leg was a fraction too long. I shortened it by the smallest possible

amount, which looks to be about 5mm, and tried again. That felt a little better. But I still felt the iWALK's foot catching the floor a couple of times on the forward swing.

(I have just investigated the bottom section of the leg has two pairs of pins the leg apart and the upper section has eight pairs of holes spaced 22mm apart. This allows the leg to be adjusted in increments of 10mm.)

At 5pm I did two more laps with the crutches – hard work after the first one.

### **Thursday 24 September 2015**

I thought I had recorded a minor triumph yesterday, when I managed to get off the bidet onto the loo lid and then stand up on the good leg while kneeling with the bad one on the lid. I was rather pleased with myself, so I am surprised that I didn't write it up!

However, I can now report the much more complicated one-legged stuff I achieved this morning.

Starting on the loo and using the right leg and both hands on the many available supports – the bidet, the bath (which is right in front of the loo and the bidet), the cistern, the window-sill (right behind them) and the loo itself, I was able to swing my bum over onto the bidet, close the loo lid, wash the necessary bits and partially dry them, swing back onto the towel (which I had placed on the lid), dry the rest, stand up, swing myself around so that the bad leg was kneeling on the lid, apply pile ointment and pull up boxers and trousers, move across to the basin (which is beside the loo) and lean the fronts of my thighs against the basin while standing on the good leg. This gave me enough stability to allow me to brush my teeth, rinse my mouth, use the mouthwash, rinse my face with cold water, reach round for the towel (on the wall to my right and behind me) and dry my face. All without putting any weight on the left foot.

After breakfast I started a batch of my home-made live yogurt and then decided to make a start on moving the patio furniture down to the sheltered veranda in front of the summer-house. I had taken most of the plastic chairs down to make room for the last consignment of logs, so I took the last two down to join them. Then I took the two hardwood folding chairs and the matching table down in two trips. The ankle, protected by the splint, stood up to this little task very well.

After my first cup of coffee I did two laps on the crutches and three exits-and-entrances with the zimmer. I'm still finding the crutches hard work, and two laps take me to my limit at the moment. The front door with the zimmer is very easy now.

I hope using the crutches will get easier once I am using them 'for real' after the surgery – though I am hoping there won't be too much of this when I can use the iWALK.

After the second cup, I adjusted the iWALK, which had suffered from my attempts to understand how the adjustment works, setting it to the beginner's level with the bottom of the knee support level with the bottom of the kneecap. I walked quite energetically around, inside and outside the house for about ten minutes, I was still convinced that the leg needed to be a little shorter so that the foot didn't catch on the ground, so I shortened it by the minimum amount ready for the next walk.

I spent much of the rest of the morning wearing the iWALK and had lunch with it on. I ate the last of the Greek salad I had made for Sunday – a very generous portion! - straight out of the bowl, emptied the debris into the bin (having got up wearing the iWALK), washed the bowl out and put it in the dishwasher. Then I finished the rest of the washing-up, poured a cup of tea and got it through to the sitting-room with just a few little sloshes.

I have decided, now that I can get the device on and off fairly quickly, that it is easiest to take it off while sitting on the recliner, then lever myself up to stand against the window-wall and put it back on. The straps are working fairly well now, using just the 'donning and doffing' adjustment to allow them to be locked and adjusted.

I did another lap with the crutches before walking across for a couple of bottle of milk. The ankle was feeling good but I decided to use one crutch anyway, and I had an easy walk in both directions in spite of the gallon of milk I was carrying.

That done, I decided to move the rest of the patio furniture our large, heavy circular teak table and its six sturdy chairs. The trick with the table is not to fold it until you get it where you want it. That way you can roll it like a big wheel, rather than attempting to carry it. With that job done, I felt thoroughly justified in being lazy for the rest of the afternoon.

Having said that, I decided to start a batch of sourdough focaccia before dinner. I am fairly confident that I will be able to manage things like that quite soon after surgery, thanks to the iWALK, but it would be good to have two or three weeks' worth in stock. I will mix the sponge before I go to bed.

Today has been fairly productive and the ankle has held up well. We need to go to Tickhill tomorrow for Anton's quiches and whatever else we fancy, but I should have plenty of time to get the bread finished.

### **Friday 25 September 2015**

I mixed my sourdough sponge as planned just before going to bed last night.

From around 5am this morning I was restless, finding the shoulders difficult to arrange without pain, but then overslept slightly, checking my watch at 8am. I felt fairly wrecked as I came down the stairs, particularly in the legs – the consequences of yesterday's exertions, presumably.

I made a pot of tea, went and did my ablutions (without yesterday's gymnastics) and then added 300 grams each of water and flour to my sourdough sponge, which had been very active when I came down. I did the exercises as usual and was not quite finished when Pat came down for breakfast.

I think it would be a good idea to continue the exercises until Wednesday rather than taking the weekend off. That should give me a better chance of the spinal going in. If possible I will keep the vertebrae on the move with light exercises at the hospital while waiting for the call.

After breakfast I added the rest of the bread ingredients and started working the very sticky dough with a scraper. I had decided to add a little more water to the recipe to see if this would give me a more workable dough. By the time I had everything incorporated the right shoulder was protesting loudly, but as the multi-stage kneading/resting process went on it calmed down.

The first two focaccias went in the oven at 2:30pm and the third at 3pm, finishing at 3pm. I then had to go to the butchers in Tickhill to pick up a consignment of quiches for Anton because Pat had been really quite poorly for the whole day – flu-like symptoms which I thought were probably a reaction to the flu-jab on Tuesday. The village's various parking spaces were all full, so I had to park two or three hundred yards from the butchers and discovered that I had not brought a crutch. Luckily the left ankle was feeling pretty good, but by the time I had done the shopping and walked back to the car with a fairly heavy bag it was protesting.

What with all that and various other bits and pieces that cropped up through the afternoon, I completely forgot to do my mobility training. I will need to do extra tomorrow.

We have a big bag of logs to barrow through and stack, and I would like to get the grass cut one more time before the operation. We have no rain at all forecast by the BBC over the next five days, so the prospects are good.

### **Saturday 26 September 2015**

I had a lie-in this morning – until 8:30am! - but managed to get the tea, the ablutions, the breakfast preparation (porridge at the weekend) and the exercises (normally missed at the weekend but not this one, just before surgery) done before Pat came down, still feeling under the weather but not as bad as yesterday.

Then there was the problem of avoiding all news broadcasts until I could watch my recording of the 6am broadcast of the Japanese Grand Prix qualification. I managed to insulate myself from everything until I had watched the whole programme, thus maintaining the suspense. A disappointing premature end to Q3, thanks to a terrifying crash by Daniil Kvyat, meant that Rosberg finished on pole. Kyat was fine, but the accident deprived Hamilton of his second attempt at a pole lap.

As soon as this was finished I did two laps on the crutches, which felt easier after a day off, and three exits-and-entrances on the zimmer. I was a bit out-of-puff afterwards, but all went fine. I decided to do lunch on the iWALK.

After lunch I barrowed the logs from the new bag round to the wood-shed – a job that left me aching and sweaty and weary, with feet that screamed to be liberated from the ProSports supports, two pairs of Anapurna socks and the Asolo boots, but a couple of cups of tea restored me surprisingly quickly.

Then there was fun and games reinstating Pat's Ebay identity. Every attempt we made to register a new password failed for one technical reason or another, but we got it done in the end.

For light relief I did another two laps on the crutches. What I said on the 23 September about planting the crutch tips just a couple of inches ahead of the foot was quite wrong. I am now planting them about a foot ahead, which gives me a much longer swing-through and therefore covers more distance for the same input of effort. The crutches are getting easier to use with practice, but I hope I won't have to use them very much. My ideal is to use the iWALK for everything...we will see!

The time has passed frighteningly quickly. Four days from now, I hope I will have had the operation – under local anaesthetic if my back exercises pay off. We have to get the study ready for me to sleep in it, at least for a while. If the rehab is six weeks with no weight-bearing and six still in a cast but weight-bearing, I don't expect to move back upstairs for six weeks. At night I will be peeing in a bottle during that time, and I have a 2-litre milk bottle into which I will be able to empty the bottle if it gets too full – I remember all too well having to ferry the bottle into the bathroom using the wheelchair

### **Sunday 27 September 2015**

Once I had popped up to the Co-op for some essential shopping, the rest of the morning and the early part of the afternoon were taken up with watching my recording of the Japanese Grand Prix. When this was over, I did three exits-and-entrances with the zimmer, and then went out to cover the pile of logs I brought through yesterday with a tarpaulin held in place by a few of the biggest logs. This done, I put my boots on and mowed the lawn. After this I was only too happy to collapse for a while before doing some preparations for dinner.

In the gap between food-prep and dinner, I did two laps on the crutches. I *think* this is getting easy gradually, but it is still hard work. This was followed by a wander round the house on the iWALK. Both these were quite welcome as my left ankle was sore after my earlier exertions. I went outside on the iWALK, walked up our slightly

sloping driveway to the gate to have a look at the outside world, and negotiated some of the more overgrown and uneven bits of the patio area. The bit I have wanted to try for some time is getting down the steps onto the lawn and back up – maybe with a crutch. I tried with one and lost my nerve, but managed it with two crutches and walked the length of the lawn to the pond and back.

That's enough adventures for one day!

I am very aware of the imminence of the operation. Tomorrow morning, at 9am, I will go up the the neighbouring village to have my hair cut short enough to last a few weeks. Then I am under orders to buy some pyjamas. The hospital's instructions say to bring 'nightwear, toiletries, slippers and a dressing gown', which Pat interprets literally. On previous stays in hospital I am fairly sure that I have worn boxer-shorts (or swimming shorts) and a t-shirt. I may try buying a sensibly-sized overnight bag as our smallest hold-all is a bit big.

The hospital has a wi-fi network for patients so I will have access to BBC iPlayer and iPlayer Radio on my phone, and I have loads of books on my Kindle. I also have lots of music on the phone and even some radio dramas. No risk of boredom, then.

### **Monday 28 September 2015**

I had an early start this morning, because I needed to fit a haircut, a mini-valet for the car and a little shopping in before Pat went off to see Anton. So I got up at 7:35am, did the usual early-morning stuff (tea, ablutions, exercises, set up for breakfast) then emptied the car of all the loose stuff to allow the car-wash guys full access to the interior. Pat was also down early, so we had breakfast together and I went off to Langold, getting the car in for its treatment and myself to the barber's shop on the dot of nine. There was already one chap waiting and another joined us just as our nice lady hairdresser was opening up. My shopping was mostly abortive – no shovel, no pyjamas but one broom – but I was home shortly after 9:30am.

After coffee I went hunting for anything that might pass as 'nightwear'. I found a pair of floppy, tracksuit navy shorts and added a navy sweatshirt to them for washing. A couple of t-shirts should complete the ensemble. I got a holdall out of the loft and rolled up a very bulky towelling dressing-gown into it.

I cleaned the handgrips of the crutches, which had become a little slippery with dried and polished sweat, and did two laps. I think these felt easier than usual, so maybe the clean grips helped and maybe I am actually getting a little stronger.

Having said that, the three exits-and-entrances with the zimmer that followed were rather clumsy, with the bad foot touching down – but not weightbearing – a couple of times. I realised that my arms and shoulders were feeling sore and weary, and remembered that they felt very heavy and achy during yesterday evening.

Based on yesterday's ambitious antics with the iWALK, when I had felt the foot catch on the ground a couple of times, I shortened the leg by one centimetre before setting off.

Just for comparison, I did the same two laps as with the crutches. The difference in physical effort was quite amazing. The small adjustment to the leg seems to have made a surprising difference I was able to walk more quickly and with greater confidence.

I then went off for a lap round the conservatory and the sitting-room, followed by a full lap of the driveway and a short visit to the patio, repeating my visit to the uneven and overgrown bit mentioned yesterday.

The knee strap has felt a little loose, in spite of pulling the adjusting end up a couple of times. I wonder if this is because the strap that stops the knee sliding too far

forwards was riding a little high. By the time I was ready to take the device off I was feeling the thigh thingummy digging into the inside of my thigh, so I moved the right-hand bit out a little and the left-hand one in a little. This felt more comfortable but I didn't take it for a trial so we will see.

After lunch, I went into town to find some pyjamas with short trousers for my stay in hospital. I have never bothered before but Pat insisted, I found some in Matalan, and then headed to Sainsbury's to top up the car and to Asda for a few groceries we needed.

Later on, I did two more laps on the crutches, which felt much harder than this morning's in spite of about six hours break between the two. I then did three more exits and entrances on the zimmer, which also felt a lot harder than this morning, with one missed hop that I had to do again.

Finally, I strapped myself into the iWALK and did the same two laps as on the crutches, which was far far easier. I just hope that I will be able to use this device straight after surgery. I was concerned that the open front of the plaster back-slab might leave the shin vulnerable, but Mr Milner actually thought it might be easier with that than with the full cast.

Time is rapidly running out now. In 48 hours from now I should be out of theatre and recovery and back on the ward. I will be glad when I am settled in at the hospital, and even gladder when the operation is over.

## **Tuesday 29 September 2015**

I slept late (8:30am) after a very disturbed night with indigestion and back pains, along (of course) with endless thinking about the operation, as you do when you can't sleep.

I did my exercises after breakfast and the back felt fine. So, ridiculously, did the ankle, which protested only a tiny bit when I took out a very heavy wheelie-bin a few minutes ago. I have to remind myself that it has been hurting quite badly on and off over the past few days.

I have decided not to do any work with the crutches or the zimmer today, to give the arm and shoulder muscles a chance to recover before I need them in earnest – which I hope I won't! The crutches are now out in the hall waiting to be put in the car, and the zimmer is in the front bedroom in case I need it to get into the house when I come home. I am going to do some more practice with the iWALK, though, as this doesn't seem to put anything under much stress and the more convincing I am for the physios the better!

My bag is halfway packed with stuff I have to take to the hospital.

## **Sunday 4 October 2015**

My operation was supposed to be number 3 on Mr Milner's morning list, but I didn't go down to theatre until past 2pm, so I can't imagine what happened to the rest of his procedures. My lovely lady anaesthetist had promised to try her best to do a spinal, and after what seemed like an awful lot of digging around she finally hit the spot and everything from my belly-button down disappeared no sensation, no movement and no muscle tone

I wasn't able to see anything or anyone from my position on the table, which was disappointing, but there was a great deal of noise – mostly the high-pitched scream of something Mr M referred to as micro-saws and an awful lot of hammering, some of which transmitted shock-waves right through my body so that my head moved on the pillow. As he said when I saw him in recovery, there is nothing delicate about orthopaedic surgery it is mostly brute force!



That night, back on the ward, I was initially relieved to feel no pain, but late at night I felt a lot – enough to overcome my reluctance to take codeine or morphine and accept both. There were two bouts of bleeding, too, which were dealt with rather crudely – but effectively, as it turned out – by adding another layer of crepe bandage to my already bulging ankle each time.

The plan was to be assessed by the physios this morning and to go home if I passed. One was a senior woman and the other a young man who didn't say anything. She was quite aggressive, only allowing me to take two or three steps with the crutches before saying I was unsafe and must stop and switch to the zimmer. She was emphatic that I needed to be seen again the following morning. I was really angry because her attitude was pretty obnoxious, and my first reaction was to discharge myself. Talking to various members of the ward team calmed me down and I agreed to be seen again on Friday provided it was with a different team and fairly early, as the Thursday team had taken ages to arrive. This was agreed.

I am not sure whether it was on Wednesday night or Thursday night, but I seem to have got up to go for a pee – stupid because there was a bottle by the bed. I'm not sure if I was fully awake or under the influence of the morphine I had taken, but I recall getting up and finding the crutches, being very aware that I was putting some weight on the left foot – strictly forbidden! - and walking around like a lost soul. I met Andy, the night charge nurse and asked him where the toilet was, in spite of the fact that it was right beside my bed-head. I think I went in and then wandered rather aimlessly until somehow I found my bed. In the morning I asked Andy if we really had met in the wee small hours and he confirmed that I had. Very weird...

The second physio team of two younger and much more cheerful women was much more positive. They agreed that I should stick to the zimmer but gave me some useful tuition before saying I was good to go home.

Then I had a session with an occupational therapist who tested me in various ways and issued me with a raised loo-seat.

Pat arrive an hour or so later and two nurses from the ward took me down to the car in a wheelchair. I thanked them and asked them to pass my thanks on to the rest of the ward team, who had been really great.

My zimmer technique at the front door worked flawlessly in spite of my feeling rather battered by the surgery. Home at last!

My last bowel movement had been on Wednesday morning before the operation, so by this morning – four days later – I was feeling a little uncomfortable. I had taken a sachet of Fibogel and one of Laxido last night and two more of the same at the end of this morning's breakfast. At around midday I decided to give it a try, and after several minutes of painful pushing I managed to pass some very hard chunks and to shed a little blood on the loo-roll. I managed to repeat the achievements of a few weeks ago, moving onto the bidet and back onto the loo, and then to the basin on my one good leg.

I took two more sachets after dinner tonight and expect something a bit more normal tomorrow morning.

I have been finding getting around on the zimmer very tiring over the last couple of days, and my last journey to my bed tonight really used the last of my physical resources. I arrived shaky and very out of breath.

Pat is going to see Anton tomorrow morning, so I will be able to try making myself a drink in the kitchen.

## **Monday 5 October 2015**

I didn't get the chance, as it turned out, because she left me with a big coffee in an insulated mug – very welcome once I'd got over burning my tongue!

I had a restless night, thanks to the bladder. I filled the bottle with around 1½ litres before I was ready to get up, so I needed a quick trip to the bathroom to empty it before getting up properly. It is now 1:30pm and there is over half a litre in the bottle, in spite of a couple of sit-down wees in the bathroom. The laxatives had really got to work by this morning, though things were still hard and painful. One of the sit-downs turned out to be a good choice because it turned into something more than a wee!

The other good news, after last night's gloom, is that I seem to be getting around more easily on the zimmer. Getting up from my recliner to plant my bum on the window-sill has suddenly become less of a strain, and pulling my right foot back to the skirting and leaning into the zimmer is also working better. Most important, I am taking longer strides with less stress this morning, pushing the frame well forward and taking a long step into it. This leaves me far less breathless than hitherto. I think the arm and shoulder muscles are coping better, too.

This is encouraging, because I have started to worry about my hospital appointment a week today. Unless I can cover a reasonable distance with the zimmer this is going to be difficult. Pat will have to drop me off at the Orthopaedic Outpatients entrance and then go back to the car park. I need to get as far as reception, hand over my letter and get to a seat. Then, when called, I have to get back on my foot from an unfamiliar chair. It will be better if I can grab a wheelchair so that I can be wheeled to x-ray and then back to the dressings clinic.

I have put the splint on my right foot for the first time today, because the ankle was starting to protest about the heavy load. It feels quite a lot more secure with the added protection. I wish I could give some similar support to the right knee, which clicks repeatedly and alarmingly as I shift my weight onto it.

The back-slab and its associated bandages were feeling rather oppressive, so I had a go at getting the two compression bandages off. These had been added to the theatre-staff's handiwork at the dead of Wednesday night to stop the flow of blood onto the bedclothes. It was difficult to find and remove all the bits of sticky tape which the nurses had used, but I got the bandages off in the end. I'll wash them and get them into the first-aid box soon. The original bandages are quite clean and white, and the bloodstains are on the heel and the sole, so not too obvious.

I have decided that I won't try using the iWALK until after next Monday's appointment, when I should have a fibreglass cast to replace the plaster back-slab. Even if I have to use the zimmer or the crutches with it, it will make walking much more comfortable and less demanding.

I got a little more organised today and tonight. The bag that held the Dosi-Fuser for my popliteal catheter turned out to be exactly the right size for my Kindle, with room for my phone as well if necessary. So I can dangle this round my neck to get the devices around the house. I also worked out that if I took the urinal bottle into the bathroom to empty it, I could drop my denture in a tooth-mug of water for the night.

With all this sorted out I was ready for bed.

## **Tuesday 6 October 2015**

I was quite restless from around 5am onwards, and when I heard Pat on the move upstairs I just felt like crawling back under the duvet and hiding. However, a mug of tea and a bit of Radio 4 brought me round, and by the time Pat had breakfast on the go I had the old familiar sensation of needing the loo. It was good to feel the body clock getting back into time, and even better to have something like a normal bowel

motion. I ought to get away with a Fibogel after breakfast and another after dinner from now on, and then maybe just one in the morning.

After breakfast I decided to go for my second shower since getting home. I was a bit more organised this time, with the towel and all the other bits ready to hand. I had also remembered to bring the wee-bottle for emptying. Getting in and out of the corner bath is still a strenuous and rather scary business – especially on the way out when I and the bath are really slippery – but I managed a long, self-indulgent wash and a safe exit to the loo-seat.

I had pretty well everything covered except that I realised when I got back to my den that I had forgotten the deodorant. I decided that I would just have to smell.

I am getting some of my moves more rehearsed now, and I think I'm building up strength in the arms and shoulders as I am finding it easier to stand up from a chair using two hands and the right leg.

My bladder is still rather hyper-active, which means I have to come through from the sitting-room more often than I would like. It has been quite awkward getting my joggers and boxers up and down for a bottle job, but it suddenly dawned on me that I have been doing this all wrong. I have been rocking from buttock to buttock on the chair, loo-seat or whatever to pull them either down or up a little at a time. Maybe it is because I am feeling a bit more stable when standing with the zimmer, but it seemed obvious today that, while holding onto the zimmer with one hand, I could drop my kecks before sitting and pull them back up after standing with the other hand – simple, really.

A fairly uneventful day really, because I really can't do very much. By the evening, the right leg was getting rather tired with heaving me up to go somewhere, and I caught myself putting the left foot down rather harder than I should. Nothing too serious but I need to watch that. Hopefully, the muscles will have recovered by morning and I can start another day on a reasonably optimistic note.

I haven't taken any painkillers at all today, and the left ankle feels pretty good.

### **Wednesday 7 October 2015**

Another restless night, with much of the time occupied with almost filling the bottle with about 1300ml of urine, mostly delivered in regular and very small pees. Again, by 5am I was fully awake and only cat-napped from them on until Pat came in with tea just after 9am.

So a lot of thinking went on, some sensible and some less so. The most significant was a re-think of what I wrote in Monday's entry about leveing the iWALK alone until I have the new cast on. I occurred to me that there is no reason why I cannot use the iWALK and the zimmer together, with the peg-leg taking the load instead of my increasingly achine arms and shoulders, and the zimmer just providing stability.

A fairly energetic feel around the shin, which is protected only by padding and bandages in the open front of the back-slab, I could find no tender spots at all. So, once breakfast was over I decided to give the idea a try, with encouraging results. The only problem was a strange electric-feeling pain in my big toe when I put my weight on the peg-leg. I started imagining some strange interference with a nerve, but the culprit turned out to be a nasty, sharp edge on the plaster which was digging into the big tendon that runs down the back of the toe. I cut a small piece of high-density foam which I had saved from some piece of packaging – the same stuff I used on the inside of the splint – and stuck it over the offending spike with Elastoplast tape. I don't think this will last long, but it is worth a try.

It worked, and walking with the iWALK while pushing the zimmer ahead turned out to be very much easier than with the zimmer alone – no need to take weight on the arms at all, or to hop awkwardly with the good leg just walk.

#### **Thursday 8 October 2015**

I slept much better last night, checking my watch just once at 7:30am and being reluctant to wake up even when Pat brought me a cuppa at around 0840. I had also produced only half as much urine as the previous night.

Even more surprising was the fact that by just before 1am I had not had a pee since breakfast – in spite of the excitement of doing our first online shop with Ocado. And when I did finally have one, having settled for only one cup of strong coffee, I produced just 200ml. My little bit of re-engineering on the cast didn't work well because the tape wouldn't stick properly to the bandage, so I decided to attack the spike of plaster with a pair of pliers, crushing it to powder to remove the source of the pressure. That done, I could have another go with the iWALK.

In fact, I had plenty of goes, because I used the iWALK with the zimmer for every journey round the house up to and including bedtime. No leaning on the zimmer – just using it for insurance against any loss of balance – so no stress on the arms and shoulders so no puffing and panting. At bedtime I was able to put out the hall lights myself for the first time.

I am still finding the straps a bit of a fidget, but it is no hardship just to put the device on when I want to walk and take it off when I stop, rather than keeping it on when I sit down and making getting up a lot more complicated. I think I need to do a little fine adjustment of the straps to ensure that I can 'don and doff' the device using only the grey buckles – that can be my target for tomorrow. It's just a case of fine-tuning the black buckles.

I hope to sleep well again tonight as Pat has found a single feather-and-down duvet to replace the folded king-size one I have been using, and has given my wonderful down pillow a tumble in the drier.

I haven't used the bottle all day, finding it easier to pee standing up in the bathroom.

#### **Friday 9 October 2015**

I looked at my watch at 2:45am this morning, when I woke for a pee, and my sleep was intermittent after that. Lying on my back with the left leg raised on two pillows was making the leg ache, so after trying various options I discarded the pillows and rolled over onto my front- my normal sleeping position when everything is working properly. I was worrying about the logistics of my Monday hospital appointment, among other things, convincing myself that I would need a chair and wondering how to make sure I got one, because they tend to be rather scarce around hospitals. At that time I definitely didn't feel confident about using the iWALK, with or without the zimmer.

As I'm writing this, I actually think I will manage with it. More follows...

When Pat came in with tea just before 9am, she had a shock there was a big – and, as far as I knew, new – bloodstain on the back of the cast, running right up over the calf muscle. Initially, I thought the iWALK straps might have opened something up, but it didn't look like the fresh blood I had seen on the night of the operation quite pale, in fact. I have been wearing a Tubegauz bandage to keep the cast clean but had taken that off last night, so the new stain could have gone unobserved for a few days.

In the end, my best guess was that all the time spent with the leg elevated on pillows must have caused it to sweat and this would have brought some of the old blood to

the surface. I decided to settle for that as an explanation and carry on as usual, which meant using the iWALK for every excursion and taking it off every time I sit down. Following this regime has given me lots of 'donning and doffing' practice, so these processes are now pretty slick – aided by the fact that the strap clips are getting easier to unfasten.

The high spot of this morning was to strip down to boxers and put the iWALK on an unprotected leg to go for a shower. To my surprise it was perfectly comfortable, and I managed to get to the bathroom and back very easily. Once I was dressed I managed to bend down, pick up my discarded clothes and carry them to the utility room. For my next trick I did some reorganising of my pills in the medicine cupboard, which is a high-level kitchen wall cabinet. I managed to stand in the corner, leaning only lightly on the worktop, and using both hands to get the first-aid box down so I could rummage among the pill boxes at the back of the cupboard. Job done, I put everything back tidily and went to the sink to take a couple of tablets, and then on to the recycling bag to dump some empty boxes.

I have been home for a week, and this is the most I have managed to do in the way of useful jobs. I'm beginning to think that my expectations of the iWALK are going to be satisfied!

I finished by returning to the bathroom to put on some deodorant and bum cream – two jobs I had forgotten after the shower. Talking of which, my navigation around the corner bath was a bit more confident today. I decided to try sitting on one side of the bath with both feet inside and try to swing my backside across to the other side. The bath is very wide and I only managed to get a very small slice of buttock on the target area, but with a bit of shuffling I made it. After the shower I reverted to my normal practice of sliding round the back of the bath, which only provides a very narrow ledge, but I took very good care to dry my bum and the bath-side and then sat on the towel. It worked, and I got back to the other side without mishap.

A satisfying and reassuring morning things are definitely getting better.

Pat was outside gardening when lunchtime came around. I decided to try a few more tricks. First, I managed to get into the utility room and fish two portions of bread out of the freezer. I took these down the kitchen and put them on a plate in the microwave to defrost. From then on I was able to follow my usual routine with the minimum difficulty, putting out plates, napkins, knives, butter, the cheese box, the bread and cheese knives and jam. I got the kettle on and emptied the teapot before giving Pat a shout and she came in to a perfectly normal lunch, after which I did most of the clearing-up, only leaving her to top up our cups of tea, give them a warm-up in the microwave and deliver them to the sitting room.

Getting the iWALK on and off is getting easier every time I use it, and it doesn't cause any real discomfort. I was walking round the kitchen, in reach of things to grab for balance if needed (which they weren't), without even thinking about it. However, I am still keeping the zimmer for walking through the house. I know I can probably walk as well with the iWALK as I was doing before the operation, but now I have a lot to lose if I fall I don't want to end up back on the table having undone all Mr Milner's good work.

I am quite confident now that I will cope with the hospital appointment on Monday without a wheelchair, walking into the clinic from the car – easy access and only a few metres from the car to reception, thankfully! - and from there to Mr Milner's area. If necessary, I think I will also be okay to walk the few hundred metres to x-ray and back. The only real difficulty I am having now is getting up from a seat. I need to try getting out of a chair with arms (other than my squashy recliner, for which I have developed a special method that works very well). It would be a bit embarrassing if I couldn't get up from a waiting-room chair when called!

We have an old-fashioned teacher's chair in the conservatory, and if I can manage that I will be fine with the waiting-room chairs. I seem to be better pushing up behind me rather than in front – pushing on a table or desk is not so good. I have found that pushing on the chair-seat behind me with one hand gives me a good start, and once my bum is off the chair the rest is relatively easy.

As a last achievement on this busiest day since coming home a week ago, I managed to open the study windows tonight – a bit of a challenge, but I made it.

I haven't used the zimmer as a crutch substitute at all today. Putting the iWALK on whenever it is needed and taking it off when I sit down has become standard procedure. I just wish the buckles on the straps would loosen a bit!

### **Saturday 10 October 2015**

This morning's big news is that I have worked out the precise details of how to pee into the loo while standing on the iWALK. This is a big step from the old process of coming into the study to use the bottle and the intermediate stage (method undisclosed!) which I mentioned at the end of Thursday's entry. I am pleased about this because, if I need to pee at the hospital, I will be able to do so without complications such as 'doffing' the iWALK.

I took charge of mixing and microwaving the coffee this morning, only leaving it up to Pat to take the tray through. I know I said before that I could carry the tray, but that was before I was iWALKing with a vulnerable freshly operated-on foot sticking out behind, which is why I am using the zimmer for balance and confidence.

### **Tuesday 13 October 2015**

We allowed two hours plus a few minutes to get to the Royal Derby, which turned out to be a really good idea because the traffic was a nightmare. There had been a very weird fatal accident between junctions 24 and 25 of the M1, and although that section was closed our section of the motorway (30-28) was keeping up to the 50mph limit imposed by the workerless road-works. It was when we were about halfway between junction 28 and the entry to the Derby outer ring road that the trouble started – huge tailbacks of the extra traffic diverted by the closure and made worse by a really odd collision on the Abbey Hill roundabout involving a low-loader carrying a gigantic excavator and two cars. Once we were past that we expected things to improve, but the diverted traffic was bunging things up almost all the way to the hospital.

Nevertheless, we managed to get there with time for a cup of tea in the waiting room. I walked using the iWALK and zimmer from a useful position in the car-park, a distance which I estimated at about 300 metres. This wasn't easy, because the pavements are coarse, gritty and irregular asphalt on which the zimmer behaved very erratically because the crutch-tips on the back legs were sticking unpredictably, making the frame want to turn all the time. Nevertheless, I managed to get to the waiting room, have a pee and find a convenient chair while Pat went to get me a cup of tea. In spite of my worries, when I was called – about half an hour late – I was able to get up from the chair and onto the iWALK quite easily. The nurses were fascinated with my antics but, I thought, quite impressed. A pity the bossy physio wasn't there!

I was taken to the plaster room and my rather grubby back-slab was removed to reveal all my wounds. Then I was fitted with a lovely new blue ScotchCast. The nurses thought I should wait for this to cure thoroughly before putting weight on it in the iWALK's shin channel, so we had a 20-minute pause before battling the asphalt back to the car. I didn't see anyone except the plaster-room nurses, but was given a fat wad of printed information. I was told that I was allowed to take a little weight on the foot and was given a rather tatty black sandal which will only really come into its own when I start full weight-bearing at the six-week mark (four weeks from tomorrow). I will then be walking in the cast until my review on the 21 December, so

Mr Milner must be very confident that the fusion will stand up to normal wear and tear without an x-ray to verify that the bones are knitting. Maybe there is enough ironmongery in there to ensure that everything holds together whatever the state of the bones.

The drive home was much easier than the drive down. Getting out of the front door and into the car had not been a problem, and getting out of the car and into the front door was equally easy, so all my rehearsing with the zimmer had been unnecessary.

Later on I walked right across the sitting-room while holding the zimmer clear of the floor, and in the kitchen I was moving around quite confidently without the frame. It has been the same this morning, so I am hoping to dispense with the zimmer fairly soon, though I don't intend to take any silly chances.

Yesterday's antics left my legs very tired. I think it might take a few days for them to recover fully from yesterday's marathon!

The technique I have developed of 'launching' myself upwards with the right hand served me very well in the waiting room. It is a strange move, because I don't think I can lift my bum more than about three inches on the right arm, but that seems to give the knee just the head-start it needs to lift me the rest of the way. It seems to take over instinctively so that the rising motion, once initiated, continues seamlessly.

After writing about my fatigue from yesterday above, I have had a really promising day on the mobility front. Pat was out for several hours and for the entire time I didn't use the zimmer for balance at all. In fact, I carried it every time I had to cross the sitting-room, and left it in the corner any time I was moving around the kitchen. If I could get the straps feeling as secure as they were before the operation, I think I would be able to abandon the zimmer altogether, but my knee doesn't seem to be settling firmly at the front of the trough. Part of the problem seems to be to do with trousers getting trapped under the straps.

### **Thursday 15 October 2015**

Yesterday we had a visit from Pat's sister Jackie and brother-in-law Bob. That made for a second fairly lazy day, with a leisurely lunch of minestrone soup and bread followed by an early tea of scones, jam and cream.

This morning hasn't been much different, with Pat finally accepting that none of our domestic routines are written in stone and that she is more than justified in taking time to recover from her great performance on Monday.

I have got back into the habit of carrying the zimmer across the sitting-room and am now leaving it in the hall opposite the sitting-room door, as there is plenty to grab onto everywhere else.

I have to be very careful to leave some slack in the leg of my joggers and to make sure that there are no seams or wrinkles under my knee when I strap myself into the iWALK. Otherwise walking is quite painful. This, of course, is the knee which had the two operations a few years ago, and there are a few lumpy bits of bone and gristle on the kneeling surface.

Once I have the straps fully tightened I can walk really well and do pretty well everything I need to in the kitchen.

Another quiet day for both of us, apart from Pat having to cook dinner.

### **Friday 16 October 2015**

I have noticed that the most important strap on the iWALK – the one that goes diagonally behind my knee to hold the shin both down and forward – is getting

wrinkled. So this morning I swapped it for the least important one – the one that goes over the calf.

I'm finding it easier to sit on the kitchen and study chairs with the iWALK in place and to get up with it on – still a little awkward, but convenient if I am not sitting down for very long. In fact, I observed this morning – when I had to get up in a hurry to answer the phone (junk call, of course!) - that it was actually easier to get up from the study chair with the iWALK on than with it off! I didn't need the little right-hand boost on the chair-seat, because I could pull really strongly with my left hand on the end of the desktop to lever myself up onto the iWALK's foot, which has a really good grip on the carpet. This is not quite so easy in the kitchen, as the floor is quite slippery, but it can be done. You live and learn!

It really blows my mind to think how difficult and exhausting this period would have been if I had not discovered the iWALK and had to get everywhere using the zimmer hop. Even when I feel the need to carry the zimmer across the sitting-room, as I still do, getting around is amazingly easy. I'm sure that without this wonderful device I would have been put right off the idea of getting the right ankle fused once the left is fully healed. As it is, I can view that prospect quite cheerfully.

Happy thought I am now well into week three of my six weeks without weight-bearing. The time seems to be passing quite quickly.

### **Sunday 18 October 2015**

I am having a bit of a battle with the adjustment of the iWALK and I can't quite work out why. It doesn't seem to be attaching as firmly to my leg as it has been doing. In particular, the knee doesn't seem to be bedding down right at the front of the knee platform – I strap it in tight and in no time it is feeling loose again. There is also a tendency for the leg to tilt outwards, making me bow-legged on one side! I have tried adjusting the thigh supports, but now I'm wondering whether my experiments with the length of the leg have somehow destabilised the structure (obviously, if the leg is too short, I will be leaning to the left). However, I just stood up from my office chair and checked with my feet a shoulder-width apart I seem to be standing symmetrically.

Pat will be out at Anton's tomorrow morning, so I will have a serious go at adjusting things then if I haven't sussed it by the end of today.

My bladder, or kidneys, or something is/are misbehaving, resulting in far too many and too frequent trips to the loo – and when I've got to go, I've *really* got to go if I want to avoid an accident. It is a relief to get to bed, because all I have to do is sit up and swivel round on the bed to use the bottle – a lot easier than standing up and strapping on the iWALK!

Last night I almost filled the bottle with getting on for a litre and a half of pee, and I can't work out how I took on that much liquid before retiring or during the night.

- I never drink more than one moderate sip of water when I wake during the night, totalling no more than about a 200ml glass, then (typically)...
- I have a 200ml mug of tea before or when I get up
- about 150ml of orange juice with breakfast
- two lots of around 100ml of water to dissolve my dispersible aspirin and my Fibogel
- a 200ml mug of tea after breakfast
- one or sometime two 200ml mugs of coffee mid-morning
- one to one-and-a-half 200ml mugs of tea with lunch



- one 200ml mug of tea around 4pm
- around 175ml of red wine with dinner
- one 200ml mug of tea around 8pm
- about 150ml of semi-skimmed milk before bed

That is a total of about 2075ml of liquid through the day, and I am fairly sure I pee about that much before retiring.

## **Tuesday 20 October 2015**

Today is a bit of a landmark I am now halfway through the non-weightbearing stage of my rehabilitation.

I experimented quite a lot yesterday with the iWALK. I am quite happy now with the length of the leg, but the instability around the knee continued until I had a sudden brainwave if I put the calf strap about halfway along the knee platform and pull it up tight, which will not cause any discomfort as it is bearing on the cast, that should keep the whole length of the lower leg firmly bedded in the foam platform.

I tried this and it improved things considerably. I am able to walk around fairly normally now, only using the zimmer for reassurance in the wide open spaces of the sitting room. This morning I actually caught myself setting out across the room without the zimmer, which suggests that the rig is feeling much more secure.

## **Wednesday 21 October 2015**

Three weeks into the non-weightbearing phase, I have finally realised that it is much easier to sit down *before* removing the iWALK rather than after. I can just put my right hand down on whatever seat I am using (on the arm of the soft recliner) and lower myself with that and the right leg before tackling the straps. Slow learner, or what?

I have started a morning exercise routine derived from what I was doing before the surgery. This is in part a response to stiff, sore neck and shoulders and partly to a leaflet on the possible cardiovascular complications of surgery. Before getting out of bed, I start by flexing and extending the toes of both feet sixteen times. Next are the flex-and-extend and rotation exercises for the 'surviving' ankle (which is doing incredibly well as 'the good leg' – no hint that there is anything wrong with the ankle at all, and that is the one Mr Milner wanted to do first!). Then the quads-versus-hamstrings one the leg lying flat is then extended so that the calf and heel lift off the mattress, held for a count of four. Finally, before getting up, the full flex-and-extend on each knee with the leg lifted, which I have been doing for years and which is actually recommended in the DVT leaflet. Everything in this set is repeated sixteen times.

Once I have levered myself off the bed onto the office chair – it swivels, so this can be fun! - I start with the neck, each movement repeated eight times rotations to left and right, nods down and up, tilts left and right, push forwards and pull back, and with the chin on the chest, half-rotations. Then the shoulders reach high with both arms; reach forward with both arms; swing both from out sideways to crossed over the chest; with hands behind the back, pull the shoulders back; with the arms hanging loosely, roll the shoulders forwards and then backwards; starting with the arms hanging down, swing them forwards, up and back past the shoulders and then forwards, down and back past the hips; and finally, starting with the arms hanging down, swing them out and up to meet above the head. Then a small bonus for the lower back side bends in a sitting position; then reach forwards to the floor and do eight short dips taking the fingertips forwards a little on each (these two helped me to avoid a general anaesthetic, so they are particularly precious!).

We were expecting a large grocery delivery from Ocado between 11am and 12noon today, and as 11am approached Pat had not come down from her shower. I decided to see if I could cope. I donned the iWALK, put the key in the front door lock and undid the chain. Then I sat at the desk with the iWALK tucked neatly in the kneehole. At 11:05am the doorbell rang, so I got up quickly – in a carpeted room this is easier with the iWALK than without, shouted up to Pat that I had everything covered and opened the door. Ryan, our delivery driver, cheerfully volunteered to take all the merchandise through to the kitchen, and by the time Pat came down I had quite a few items unpacked, fridged and checked off the list. We finished the cold stuff together, paused for coffee and sorted the rest out.

I seemed to have got the iWALK straps adjusted perfectly for once and was quite agile, ducking and diving round the kitchen from bags to list and back. By the time we had everything put away I was feeling really pleased with myself.

Later on, I walked into the sittingroom and had almost done the full length of the room before I realised that I had not collected the zimmer on the way in, which I have been doing every time I come in. I just did a U-turn and went back for it. I don't want to risk damaging my ankle through a stupid accident, so I intend to stick with this precaution even though I am walking quite safely everywhere else in the house

Tomorrow a house guest will be arriving stepson Aidan's pointer/labrador cross Bailey. He's a fairly excitable hound who has spent the odd weekend with us before, but this time it is for two weeks. Could be interesting – especially at night, as he is used to sharing the matrimonial bed! He won't be allowed upstairs to our bedroom, so we may have a battle for the 2ft 6in divan to which I am currently confined.

### **Thursday 22 October 2015**

This morning was quite busy.

First, the easy bit. I cooked 500 grams of Agen prunes, which arrived in our Ocado delivery yesterday, to go with my morning muesli.

Then the harder bit. My morning gymnastics in the bathroom, the first phase of which culminates in me landing fairly hard on the loo seat, had loosened bolts in the seat hinges to the point where the seat was actually in danger of falling off – the consequences of very poor engineering design as much as of my weight! So, armed with a pair of pliers (not needed, as it turned out) and a number 2 Philips screwdriver, I installed myself on the edge of the bath with my knees on either side of the loo.

The wing-nuts undid quite easily – the result of my having oiled the threatened studs generously the last time I had to do this job without the handicap of a leg in plaster – but this took a while, not least because one had to be done left-handed. Why do the manufacturers put such long studs on loo seats? Eventually I had the seat laid upside down on the pan and was able to line the bits up and tighten the two silly little bolts. I was expecting to have problems getting the nuts started on the studs, but even the left-hand one engaged fairly easily.

So about twenty minutes' work had the job done. It's really cheering to manage a few jobs in spite of the cast and the law against weightbearing.

### **Friday 23 October 2015**

Our house guest, Bailey, arrived yesterday afternoon and showed no concern whatever when Aidan quietly left. He settled in really well and didn't cause me any problems by jumping up or barging into me. We (he and I) had quite an *interesting* night together. The predicted battle over my bed didn't happen somehow we managed to share out the very limited space between us when he jumped up in the small hours and had quite a restful time until he heard Pat on the move and deserted me.

Mr Milner insisted on me taking aspirin for six weeks after the operation, with a note on my discharge letter saying that, for the sake of my stomach, I should not take my regular Naproxen anti-inflammatories until the aspirins were finished. I now take something called Omeprazole to protect my stomach, having taken Naproxen and previous anti-inflammatories without protection for years without stomach problems, but the hospital knew this and still told me not to take this and the aspirin together. I have never been certain that these drugs did me any good, but after three weeks without Naproxen I am pretty sure they did, as aches and pains have flared up all over the place. With almost three weeks still to go, I am going to have to make do with paracetamol.

### **Monday 26 October 2015**

For 'almost three weeks' (above) read 'just over two weeks' the time is passing more quickly, subjectively, than I expected. In 16 days from today I will be able to start weight-bearing (which should mean that the leg gets much more exercise), stop taking aspirins and do a trial run with Naproxen. Meanwhile I am trying to remember to take three or four doses of paracetamol a day to keep the shoulders as comfortable as possible.

I am not sure how comfortable the weight-bearing will be because when I rock the foot from side to side on the floor it feels as if there is a big round lump under the instep. I have just tried the nasty black flip-flop the plaster nurses gave me and that feels a little more stable but very peculiar. Obviously the cast isn't going to allow the ankle to roll sideways – or do anything else, come to that! - for the remaining six weeks but I don't think walking is going to be either efficient or comfortable.

The iWALK is still working well but the skin over the left kneecap is taking a bit of a pounding. I have to be very careful to adjust the leg of the joggers before locking the straps – particularly keeping the thick and hard piped outside seam well away from the kneeling zone – and even then I never know whether the knee is going to be comfortable when I put the device on until I start walking. This is the knee with the scars and what feels like a bone spur on the lower edge of the kneecap from the two operations done in 2008. The skin feels rather dry and rough, so maybe it could do with moisturising and a little extra padding.

There is less and less to report each day, now that life has settled into a routine. My various gymnastic moves have now become standardised. Our house guest Bailey has settled in really well, sometimes sharing my narrow bed for part of the night and generally making each day a little more interesting. He is a boisterous lad, but nothing he has done has worried me, even when perched on the iWALK.

### **Friday 30 October 2015**

The high spot this week has been the decision finally to dump the crummy Haier washing machine we were persuaded to buy from our local repairer and buy a fairly advanced Zanussi model, which was delivered yesterday evening. The old one was going to be taken away by the delivery guys, but it turned out that they weren't allowed to do this until we disconnected the old one – me in my state of health! The phrase 'more than my job's worth' springs to mind...

It is now 5:30pm and we are now waiting for another local repairer who has done work on our cooker in the past. He is small and quite elderly and Pat is convinced that he won't be able to do the job. His card includes 'washing machines' among the list of appliances repaired, so I am optimistic. Our little utility room is very cramped, but based on experience I am pretty confident that I could have done the job myself but for the bloody leg!

Fingers crossed...

## **Saturday 31 October 2015**

Our repair man arrived at around 6pm yesterday evening. He didn't look quite as small or as elderly as we thought we remembered him, and was unfazed by the job and the cramped working conditions. He managed to get the old washer out from its slot under the utility room worktop and agreed with my suggestion that I should turn the water off at the main stopcock to save more difficulty getting to the supply end of the machine's hose. I did this and the rest progressed quite well. There was a dodgy moment when, after spending a few minutes crouched under the worktop in the space where the washer would go, with the washer in the doorway behind him, when I had to push the machine in a little further to allow the mains cable to reach the socket. Then he couldn't get out, so I had to pull the machine back to give him more room. He still had a struggle unwinding himself but got out in the end. He then rocked the old machine up the hallway to tuck in a corner. Total bill £40.

This morning Pat started a wash, which has just finished.

I have had two disturbed nights thanks to my right shoulder, which has become very painful after I have turned in. I actually got out of bed in the early hours of this morning to do some mobilising neck and shoulder exercises, and I have just (around 12:45pm) done these again. I think my arms and shoulders are just getting tired of heaving my weight around, in which case they should be relieved in just eleven days when I start moving around a bit more normally.

## **Sunday 1 November 2015**

I did another set of the exercises before turning in and had a much more comfortable night – not totally pain-free, but nothing to keep me awake.

Yesterday I was appalled to discover that I had not fed my sourdough bread culture since the 14 September (I normally do this every 14 days. I hurried to stir the depressingly bubble-free goo thoroughly and add 50 grams to 100 grams of water, then stirring in 100 grams of bread flour. The mix was looking very lifeless at bedtime, so I was really relieved to see this morning that it had bubbled up fairly normally. I plan to repeat the feeding process this afternoon and then perhaps bake a batch of my plain sourdough focaccia on Tuesday if the iWALK and I can cope.

My bladder has been really hyperactive today after a mug of tea at around 8:30am, a small glass of orange juice followed by a second mug of tea at breakfast (plus half a glass of water to deliver my aspirin and Fibogel) and a strong coffee at around 11am. I have had to pee no less than three times since the coffee – three fairly full-bladder events.

I am writing this now because I can do it without taking the iWALK off if I get another urgent call.

## **Monday 2 November 2015**

After what I wrote yesterday, the pee-bottle was less than half full (it was almost full yesterday and Saturday) by the time I got up this morning and my bladder has been a little less demanding so far. I have had my usual ration of two teas and an orange juice and am currently (11:45am) finishing my only cup of coffee, which I have made quite a lot weaker and milkier than usual. It still tastes very pleasant, compared with the one I made yesterday which was definitely too strong for even my macho taste.

I had my best night's sleep for a while last night, partly thanks to a quieter bladder, but also to Bailey, who has discovered the bed in the front bedroom, which was occupied for quite a long time by Aidan, his owner. Maybe he can smell a trace of his Dad even on freshly washed bedding.

I watched the highlights of the Mexican Grand Prix after breakfast, and since then have been building our fortnightly Ocado shopping list this morning, ready for consultation with Pat when she gets back from visiting Anton, plus renewing our bus passes and finishing my 70+ driving licence renewal (my photograph, obtained electronically from the passport office, seems to have been bleached out to almost nothing on the way!).

The second sourdough refresh produced a good frothy result, so I made the sponge at around 6pm ready to bake tomorrow. By bedtime it was beginning to look quite active.

Looking back at bedtime, I realise that my bladder has been much less active today. I had a pee before dinner at around 6:30pm and nothing else until 10:30pm on the way to bed. Let us hope that this improvement is maintained.

I have just done a full set of neck and shoulder exercises, as I did this morning before breakfast. The upper arms and shoulders have been quite sore through the day, and levering myself up from the recliner onto the iWALK had got quite difficult by the end of the day. I am trying to maintain paracetamol at two tablets four times a day but I rarely remember all the doses.

### **Tuesday 3 November 2015**

The bottle was about two-thirds full this morning, but I haven't been going to the loo frequently since getting up. I had no recollection of lying awake for long periods, so I must be using the bottle on auto-pilot.

I started work on the focaccia after breakfast, and it all went fairly well. However, when it came to the kneading-in-the-bowl routine I realised that I couldn't manage this standing up on the iWALK. No problem, though I was able to do the work sitting down with the bowl on my lap. This meant that I had to stay in the kitchen for the hour-or-so of the knead-rest-knead-rest sequence, but luckily there were two interesting programmes on Radio 4 to entertain me. I divided the dough into two rather than the usual three baking tins and these are now on top of the cooker under clingfilm rising.

My bones were protesting somewhat by the time I was able to take a proper seat, particularly the lower back, but I feel really satisfied that I managed the job. Three cheers for Emmanuel's amazing easy kneading technique!

The bread-making was interrupted by the arrival of yesterday's Ocado order, but this fitted in quite conveniently.

I cut the focaccias up and bagged them for the freezer at 5:30pm. Unfortunately one had stuck very badly to the tin, but the other was fine. I don't seem to have gained much from making two rather than three focaccias so will probably go back to three next time.

I started the day feeling sleepy and quite reluctant to get up, and have been very weary this afternoon – I went to sleep in the chair after my afternoon cuppa and woke up only because I needed to pee and felt quite confused, . Otherwise, loo visits have been well down on recent days.

### **Friday 6 November 2015**

The days are beginning to drag as I get nearer to the six-week mark and – I hope! - the freedom to start walking on two legs. The iWALK has been incredible, giving me far more freedom of movement than any of the alternatives, though the straps are a fiddle to keep adjusted. After all this time I am still learning new ways of doing things, especially getting up from chairs, which seems much easier now, presumably as my

arms and shoulders have got stronger – though they are constantly painful now from all the heaving and hauling.

My doubts about the effectiveness of anti-inflammatories may have proved misguided – I hope. Once I come off the aspirin next week I will re-start the Naproxen and hope that the various aches and pains will settle down.

I think the plan on Wednesday (just five days away now!) will be to start walking with the zimmer and increase the weight on the left leg progressively, hoping that I will be able to abandon the frame more-or-less immediately. I keep thinking of all the things I will be able to start doing again, and hoping that my optimism won't prove excessive!

### **Saturday 7 November 2015**

I had another restless night, thanks to the combination of my stupid bladder and my battered shoulders.

The initial pees were frustrating in spite of feeling a strong urge to go, I found it difficult to get started and, when I did, the flow-rate was low and the process was quite stingy. Later in the night things freed up quite a lot and by 9am the bottle was almost full – around 1.5 litres.

Again, it was difficult to find a position in which the shoulders were not too painful, though this was nowhere near as bad as a few nights ago.

I have been peeing at around hourly intervals ever since breakfast. This is not just a strong urge to go and then a frustrating dribble every visit is a fairly normal pee in terms of colour, quantity and flow rate. I cannot imagine where all the fluid is coming from. I have cut down from two coffees to one each morning and am making it weaker and milkier to reduce the caffeine content, but still it comes. At least this is giving me plenty of practice at getting the iWALK on and off, and I have now pretty well stopped putting it on while standing (except in the bathroom).

Just four days until I stop putting it on at all and start 'full weight bearing', as it says on my Discharge Summary from Derby...

### **Monday 9 November 2015**

Another restless night spent trying to find somewhere painless to tuck my shoulder and filling the bottle almost as full as yesterday. Interestingly, I didn't need to pee for a couple of hours after breakfast. I have been doing a few trivial but necessary odd jobs – cooking prunes, refilling the washing-up liquid dispenser, emptying the office waste-basket – while Pat is visiting Anton. Basically, I am just trying to pass the time between now and Wednesday morning as quickly as possible.

I have my strategy worked out for starting to weight-bear. I will use the iWALK as usual to get myself up, ablated and breakfasted, and will then take it off while standing with the zimmer, lean both hands heavily on the frame to support as much weight as possible (hopefully the last heavy work for the poor aching shoulders) and start walking, easing back off the zimmer as much as I comfortably can. From there on, it will be a case of assessing what I can and cannot do – for instance, can I get upstairs, and if so can I manage a standing shower...?

### **Tuesday 10 November 2015**

I had a very restless early morning. At about 5am I took Paracetamol but just couldn't find a position in which my shoulders would allow be to relax. I ended up sitting up against a pile of pillows but still couldn't get back to sleep, so around 6am I put Radio 4 on iPlayer on my phone and listened to the *Today* programme until Pat brought me a cup of tea just after 9am.

The bottle was only about one-third full when I got up, so my sleep earlier obviously hadn't been badly disrupted by endless pees!

I am writing this at 10:45am. At this time tomorrow I should have a good idea of how mobile I am going to be for the next six weeks. For starters, I need to get upstairs to trim my beard and have a *real* shower, and it would be great to be back in my Tempur bed with the power lift. Whether I can manage my blasted bladder using the *en-suite* loo remains to be seen, but I don't think I can face using the bottle in the next bed to Pat!

### **Wednesday 11 November 2015**

Last night, before going to bed, I tried putting a short Anapurna sock on over the cast and then getting the nasty black flip-flop on – a bit fiddly, but I managed.

This morning I was awake early and before 9am yesterday's two doses of Fibogel were urging me to get up and go to the loo. I put the iWALK on, hopefully for the last time on the left leg, and went through my usual bathroom gymnastics, also perhaps for the last time until the next operation. I set the kitchen table for breakfast and had a cup of tea. As Pat had not yet surfaced I went through to the sitting-room and took off the iWALK. I put the sock and flip-flop on and then, to my absolute delight, stood up from my recliner using both legs and with only a little help from my aching arms, grabbed the zimmer and walked across the room.

Unsurprisingly, the left foot felt very odd, but after a few laps I had taken the weight off my arms and was putting it all on the left foot – without pain. I walked back through to the kitchen for breakfast. Getting up from the table was even easier than from the recliner, and I walked back to the sitting-room for my cup of tea, hardly leaning on the zimmer at all.

After tea, I stood up and astonished Pat by walking around the room without the zimmer, moving fairly normally. I picked up the faithful iWALK and carried it into my study/bedroom (soon to be just the study, I hope) to be stashed ready for the next operation.

I have one more aspirin to take tonight, presumably on the basis that walking more normally will maintain healthy circulation in both legs, and tomorrow I can start attacking all the aches and pains with Naproxen (the hospital instructed me not to take both because of the risk of damaging my stomach lining).

Walking on the cast with the flip-flop feels quite weird. I come down on the heel and then the foot tilts forward rather alarmingly, but it works. The heel feels quite squashy when I put my weight on it, but that is mostly the edge sinking into the carpet, I think.

I now need to find somewhere to stash the zimmer, because I don't expect to need this either until the next operation. The next challenge will be the stairs. If I can get up and down comfortably I will be able to give my beard a much-overdue trim and then try and proper standing shower.

So far, I feel really encouraged. It looks as if phase two of my rehab will be a great deal easier, physically and psychologically, than phase one. I might even try visiting the garden later on, which will be an adventure because I haven't been out of the house since the hospital visit over four weeks ago.

After coffee I had my first go at the iron spiral staircase, which turned out to be very little harder than before the operation, when the left ankle and the right knee made them a bit problematical. Once up in the bedroom, and once I had looked in the mirror, I decided to deal with my six weeks' accumulations of beard – a truly horrible mess in the cold light of day! I plugged in my clippers and gave it a thorough trim, and then used my little battery clippers to deal with nose and ear hair.

Coming back down the stairs was more-or-less as easy as before the operation, too, though the heel of the flip-flop felt slightly insecure I had to watch to ensure that I had it fully on the tread of the target step.

We have been hearing a strange, very high-pitched whistle for a few weeks, and Pat had tracked it down to the upstairs loo cistern. While up there I took the lid off the cistern and fiddled with the ball-cock, confirming that the valve really was the source of this improbable noise. I went downstairs and brought back two pairs of pliers, and after about half an hour of tinkering I manage to get the ball-valve to shut off completely before the water reached the overflow. Job done.

Finally, after lunch, I decided to try having a *real* shower. That really was the treat of the day (or, rather, of the past six weeks!). I spent ages under the fierce mains-pressure spray delivered by our wonderful combi-boiler, washing everything thoroughly (except the sole of my right foot, as I didn't fancy standing one-legged on the left one and relying on my leg-condom for traction on the shower-mat).

Another minor triumph later was to carry a tray with two mugs of tea through from the kitchen to the sitting-room for the first time since the operation without spilling a drop.

At one point during the afternoon I stood up and tried to walk without the black flip-flop. It was all I could do to stay on my feet and get back to my chair without falling, because the hard round heel part of the cast gave me no help at all. Walking with the flip-flop – which is actually very stiff and neither flips nor flops – still feels strange, as if something is squashing as I put my weight on it, but I am getting used to it.

I intend sleeping in my own bed tonight, for the first time in six weeks, and using the loo rather than the bottle. I just hope I don't have to walk too many miles before morning!

### **Thursday 12 November 2015**

By the end of yesterday evening the left foot was feeling hot, achy, itchy and a rather tight fit in the cast, so I was glad to take it upstairs to bed. The Tempur memory-foam mattress, the electrically operated head rest and the pure goose down pillow made my bedtime read much easier than it had been downstairs, and I slept pretty well. I don't know how many times I woke up to pee – enough to fill the bottle – but I don't remember lying awake for long at any time. There was hardly any discomfort from my shoulders after they had had a day of relative rest, so no trouble finding a comfortable position.

The foot had settled down nicely by the time I got up, just after 8:30am, and I managed to remember my old auto-pilot early-morning routine, so I got downstairs with the Kindle, the phone and all the other clutter. I made tea and left a cup on the stairs for Pat – taking it up would, I decided, be pushing my luck! Then I did my ablutions, for the first time in six weeks without the complex gymnastics, and then a set of sitting neck and shoulder exercises in the kitchen while drinking my tea.

I had my first little visit to the outside world later on, finding no problems in getting down and then back up the outside doorstep. It was good to feel a bit of sunshine on my skin and to breathe some fresh air. Unlike with the iWALK, I have no anxiety about balance walking with the black flip-flop feels perfectly natural, if a little squishy.

Pat has gone shopping, and I should for the first time be able to help her unload the car. I have also committed myself to cooking dinner tonight fried salmon fillets with boiled baby potatoes, wilted spinach and green beans. It will be good to take some of the burden off Pat.



## Friday 13 November 2015

I managed dinner fairly well last night, though the left leg felt fairly weary by the time we sat down.

I had a reasonable night, although my left shoulder was aching and making it difficult to get comfortable in bed. Today has been quite uneventful, so there is nothing much to report.

The foot continues to feel a little strange when I walk on it – not painful but just not quite comfortable. Pat says the heel of the flip-flop squashes as I put weight on it, which is what it feels like. But she also says that I am walking more normally than I did before the surgery, when the left ankle was the main problem. Certainly my gait feels quite symmetrical when I walk, which is amazing really considering the different 'footwear' on each side! There is a patch on the back of the heel that feels sort of itchy, but that is the bit that actually felt sore when I was using the iWALK, so that has to be progress. I get all sorts of twinges, but nothing really unpleasant.

I have discovered that I can kneel quite comfortably on both knees and get up again easily, as when I had another go at the loo seat today. One of the bolts I tightened on the 22 October had come loose because of my early-morning crash landings, so I took the seat right off and dismantled and washed the hinges thoroughly. Once the various bits had dried I reassembled the hinges, squeezing a drop of SuperGlue gel into the countersunk hole where the each bolt goes before tightening it down. That – plus my less awkward routine at poo-time – ought to hold it all together.

I really is great to be able to tackle a few jobs now.

That said, I'm happy to leave tonight's regular Friday dinner – chicken wings and wedges followed by an Aldi Magnum-style choc-ice each – to Pat.

I think getting back on 500mg of Naproxen a day is beginning to help the aches and pains...

## Monday 16 November 2015

After a lazy Saturday we had a surprise visit from Alistair, Julie and The Boys yesterday, which meant that I was on my feet quite a lot. I paid my first visits to the garage to sort stuff out with Al, the high spot being to get up on the workmate step to get a heavyish basket of decorating tools down from above head-height and later getting up again to put it back.

By the end of the day the leg was feeling weary and mildly painful, but it doesn't seem to be any the worse for all that this morning.

I had a reasonable night last night, untroubled by shoulder pain for the first time since I moved back upstairs, with lots of pees but lots of sleep. I managed to get myself up just after 8am (after staying in bed until about 9:30am yesterday!) and do my exercises, empty the dishwasher and start setting up for breakfast before Pat came down.

After a coffee with Pat before she set out for her regular Monday care visit to Anton I took three carrier-bags of clothes out of the chest of drawers in the study-bedroom – now with the bed symbolically stripped – and put everything away upstairs (two trips up and down). After lunch I found that Pat had left a small stack of clean laundry on the stairs, so I took that up. My transition to normal sleeping arrangements is complete, and I am becoming really competent and confident on our iron stairs, even if the big black flip-flop feels a bit slippery on that surface.

## **Tuesday 17 November 2015**

I was awake at 7am for a pee this morning, having slept well in spite of nearly filling to bottle. I intended to get up at 0800, but when I came awake again it was 8:10am – not bad for an out-of-practice body clock. I got up, put the kettle on, did the ablutions and sat down for my cuppa while doing the exercises, which went fairly painlessly.

I have been having doubts about the big black flip-flop, and I realised a few days ago that the heel of the cast is pretty-well spherical and can rotate sideways through quite a large angle unless the velcro strap is really tight. I have been feeling some pressure on the outside of the foot and realised that I need to be careful to get the shoe in exactly the right position before tightening the strap, and I managed this after today's exercises. As a result the foot felt much more comfortable. The velcro has been fraying along the edges, so I have had to give it a haircut today!

I really need to get out and about and do something useful, such as maybe visiting Retford farmers' market next Saturday in preparation for Christmas. At least I managed to order one of Pat's presents this morning.

## **Wednesday 18 November 2015**

I had a bad night with the bladder last night. I think I saw every hour on the clock when I got up to pee, and by 8am I had almost filled the bottle with about 1.5 litres of urine. I have been peeing quite a lot through the morning, too, and it probably wasn't very sensible to have a second cup of coffee. I have an appointment with the urology team at Bassetlaw on the 4 January, thank goodness, and I hope they will be able to help. The Tamsulosin capsules I have been taking for ages no longer seem to be helping.

I managed to beat Pat to the door this morning and brought the wheelie-bin in from the gate with no difficulty – another small but significant landmark. I also strained and decanted the stock made from Sunday's chicken leftovers.

## **Thursday 19 November 2015**

It is midday and I have just walked briskly up to the local shops, bought two 2-litre bottles of milk (weight about 4kg) and walked briskly back again – a total distance of about a quarter of a mile. There was a little discomfort – just a slight ache around the outer heel every time I put the foot down – but no sign whatever of weakness. Walking this route today was far more comfortable and easy than it was before the surgery, when I had to watch the cambers on pavements very carefully – today I just ignored them! I put one of my short Anapurna walking socks on before the big black flip-flop and it seemed to be just enough to stabilise it.

The main reason for doing this was to check whether I might be able to cope with a visit to Retford Farmers' Market on Saturday. The distance from the car park to the market and back is about three times what I did this morning, so it is probably manageable. I will see how I feel on Saturday morning.

Later on I lit the wood-burner in the sitting-room, crawling around on my knees more easily than I was able to do before the surgery – and getting back onto my feet more easily too.

After that I went down to the bottom of the garden to clean the pond pump, which was just bareful maintaining a flow of water to the waterfall. I managed to use the garden kneeler, which has a tubular frame with handles for pulling oneself up, which made the job quite easy.

Then I had a very welcome shower and shave.

## Friday 20 November 2015

After a great day, today began rather badly. I woke up for only my second pee of the night at around 4am and then snuggled down to enjoy my sense of achievement from yesterday. I struggled a bit with pain from the shoulders, so I didn't drop straight off as I usually do after a pee-call. In fact, I seemed to stay completely awake until the next pee at 6:30am, though I am never sure of these recollections. Anyway, when I came to once more it was 8:30am and I felt really groggy. I did the toe and ankle exercises but left the leg ones out. By the time I had had yet another pee and got my clothes and various walking accessories on, emptied the bottle – which, mysteriously, was only about a quarter full compared with three-quarters yesterday – put my denture in and got down the stairs, it was 8:50am, and I still felt groggy.

The shoulder pains don't seem to have been responding to the daily exercise programme, so I decided to miss this out today. By midday there was far less pain than usual, even after over half an hour putting together an order on the Ocado online shopping site, so maybe my belief in the power of exercise to manage muscle and joint pain isn't always right.

## Monday 23 November 2015

The 'high spot' of Saturday was a ride up to Tickhill to Eatons, our new butcher. Amazingly, because the place is always busy, the first empty space we found was almost outside the shop, so I only got about 20 metres of walking. We got Anton's quiches, a pork pie for me, a gammon steak and some venison steaks. I ate half the pie for lunch and the rest for lunch on Sunday, and that was more-or-less all the 'vigorous' activity. We ordered a pizza delivery for Saturday night and I cooked two of the venison steaks with sauté potatoes and green beans.

Last night was fairly busy on the urinary front, with the bottle almost full by the time I got up at 8:10am. I had a pee just after 7:30am and needed another before I got up, and it was a modest but 'proper' pee – not just a trickle. I think my urology appointment in January is going to be interesting...

Just four weeks to go before the cast comes off!

This morning I made up a big batch of bolognese sauce using a kilo of lean mince and two different jars of Dolmio sauce. This made five decent portions ready for the freezer. We used half a portion with *paglio e fieno* (green and white) tagliatelle for dinner – very nice with grated Grana Padano cheese, which we have discovered has more flavour than even the most expensive supermarket Parmesan and is quite a lot cheaper.

I lit the wood-burner early in the evening, going out for extra logs with no difficulty, and tended it through until bedtime.

## Tuesday 24 November 2015

Another active night for the bladder, producing a pretty full bottle, though I didn't wake up for the first time until after 4am (that's not counting the awakening due to my shoulder just after midnight, when I thought I might as well try a pee but didn't produce anything!). I think I woke for another pee sometime after 5am and after that I only managed catnaps, getting up at 8am feeling very weary.

After breakfast this morning I cooked two packets of prunes and then managed to speak to my credit-card company with surprisingly little time-wasting and a satisfactory result – my card, which has been misbehaving, is being replaced.

By 10am I had brought in the wheelie-bin and two baskets of logs and kindling, and had laid the fire with plenty of *The Sunday Times* (best use for a Murdoch paper) and small wood.

## Thursday 26 November 2015

Pat's sister Jackie and husband Bob came over and we went to our local, the Blue Bell, for a top-quality pub lunch. Then the rest of the afternoon was spend in family gossip, followed by a snack supper.

At bedtime I realised, after I had taken off the Big Black Flip-Flop, that I had left something behind in the en-suite. So, without thinking, I walked back through on the cast and discovered to my delight that I could manage quite well. This led to the decision to try getting to the loo instead of using the bottle whenever I needed to pee through the night.

It worked. Once my eyes had adjusted to the darkness I had no difficulty walking through for each of the four or five pees the bladder demanded through the night. Bye-bye bottle!

We did an epic lap round Aldi this morning, with me pushing a trolley that got steadily heavier (and more expensive – at £140 worth!). The legs stood up to this very well, and after a pause for coffee when we got home I managed to unload the car almost single-handed and stash a lot of the stuff away.

I have to admit, though, that we were pretty lazy for the rest of the day. I spent quite a lot of time swopping emails with grandson Barney, trying to sort out the plan for picking him up tomorrow from his student accommodation in Huddersfield based on a really silly map. It's going to be great to have him with us for a couple of days.

At the end of the day the legs are not feeling bad. I think the right ankle is beginning to protest about having to be the 'good leg' for so long – eight weeks since the operation – but I'm keeping it supported with the active ankle and hoping it will keep going until it only has to handle 50% of the load. Actually the right one is doing really well – it feels as if the fusion has set really hard, even when I'm doing silly things like getting down on my knees to lay the fire and up again.

## Monday 30 November 2015

I have been a bit lax with this diary over the past few days because on Friday we drove up to Huddersfield to collect grandson Barney from his superb univerty residence, have been doing stuff with him pretty solidly and then took him back yesterday afternoon.

The 'stuff' was mainly watching the three *Hobbit* extended editions, starting in typical Barney style with the three discs of appendices that came with *The Battle of the Five Armies* and then watching the three movies back-to-back.

To be fair Barney did go down the garden for a couple of sessions on the drums, and played his acoustic guitar in the kitchen while (hopefully!) absorbing his granny's lesson on how to make sticky toffee pudding.

The drive up was atrocious – gale force winds and torrential rain squalls, and our normally excellent satnav struggled with the minor country roads north of Huddersfield, but we got back safely.

On Saturday evening I finally decided to bite the bullet and try to sort this wretched PC out – it has been getting slower and slower for weeks. I have been nagged repeatedly by pop-ups inviting me to install *Windows 10* and on Barney's recommendation I decided to risk it. I started the process late on Saturday afternoon and it was still claiming to be downloading at bedtime, so I switched the monitor off and left it to play with itself. Believe it or not, it was still doing that when I got up on Sunday morning. The actual installation actually started a bit later, but was still at it when we left for Huddersfield after a light lunch. To my amazement it had actually finished when we got home, and after an hour of tweaking this morning it is beginning to look like a computer again. The new web browser, *Edge*, seems to be strictly for

low-level users – it has no menu bars so no access to the techy stuff. Fortunately it does offer the option to open the current page in *Internet Explorer*, now up to version 11, so I was able to set that as my default browser, set my own site as the home-page and create a desktop shortcut to this. *OpenOffice Writer* works (though it behaved oddly, losing its delete and backspace functions, when I first tried it), as what I am doing now proves, as do *Word* and *Excel*. Web access seems much faster than before, and once I changed the desktop background from black to my usual blue/grey I could see that all my shortcuts had survived, if not in their usual places.

So we will see...

Getting back to what this diary is actually *about*, I had a weird experience this morning. I woke up – for the first time, as far as I could remember – shortly before 7am! I went for a pee and then failed to get back to sleep because my shoulders were just painful enough to stop me settling in one position for a long period, so did my toe and ankle exercises and then got up at 8am feeling fairly well rested.

Weirdly, while I was dressing I had a brief attack of cramp in the left calf muscle – the one inside the cast so no way to massage it, let alone stretch it as the ankle is now fully fused! Luckily it faded quite quickly. I used to get these attacks pretty well every day, but this was the first since the operation.

Apart from some twinges on the inside of the left ankle, just at the bottom of the tibia – or where the tibia was before Mr Milner got at it with his saw, hammer and chisel – I am fairly pain-free. The shoulders are now much better than they were, though far from perfect.

As the day comes towards its end, I can report that the PC is doing everything far more quickly than it has for a long time and that everything I have tried seems to be working fine.

## **Tuesday 1 December 2015**

Not such a good night, with just enough niggling pain from the shoulders to make settling down difficult. Only one or two trips to the loo, though. I had a good long shower after breakfast to wake me up and to give the shoulders a long, hot soaking. This seems to have eased the discomfort a little.

I managed a few jobs this morning, the most challenging being to correct the tyre pressures on the car using my amazing Maplin 5-in-1 compressor/jump-starter/work-light/inverter/12-volt supply. This involved kneeling down and getting up again four times, which I managed fairly effortlessly and completely painlessly.

More Christmas shopping online filled the morning.

I cooked dinner tonight – hamburgers, hash browns, fried tomatoes and onions, and green beans.

At bedtime I decided that *not* doing the neck and shoulder exercises had not helped my shoulders to recover, so I decided to do them before bed – but gently.

## **Wednesday 2 December 2015**

I slept reasonably well, with very little aggravation from the shoulders, but I was very reluctant to get up at 8am. I did, though, because for some reason I feel that I should maintain a disciplined routine.

The morning (after more neck and shoulder exercises) was filled with a visit to the dentist to get my denture mended because one front tooth broke off last night at dinner (this involved quite a long walk to join up with Pat), and a mammoth shop at Morrisons, which involved about an hour of walking behind a trolley getting gradually heavier and ending up almost unpushable! The legs and feet stood up to this very

well. We hadn't taken enough shopping bags to make the load manageable, so I had three very heavy ones to manhandle from the trolley to the car and from the car to the kitchen.

I managed without too much difficulty, and then had a new adventure. Pat wanted out advnet calendar down from the garage loft, so I had my first attempt at climbing a ladder. I was (obviously) very careful, using my ancient Black & Decker stepladder with nice wide treads. I only needed to go halfway up, thanks to my careful packing away of everything after last Christmas, and was able to deliver the calendar proudly to Pat. Needless to say, she wasn't exactly pleased about the laddered escapade!

She will be away tomorrow so I will have all day to myself. I plan to make another batch of sourdough focaccia – and to try kneading the dough standing up this time.

As planned, I refreshed my sourdough stash and made the sponge for tomorrow's bake at around 9pmbefore getting to bed early as Pat needed to be up at 7am.

### **Thursday 3 December 2015**

I had a frustrating night. Perhaps because of pushing a heavy trolley at Morrisons and humping grossly overweight bags when we got home, my shoulders were playing up – just enough discomfort to prevent me from settling in any one position long enough to get to sleep. I must have got a fair amount of sleep, but was up and down a lot.

So as soon as Pat was on her way I started work on the bread, and as I hoped I managed to do all the kneading standing up. The right shoulder wasn't very happy about it, but it coped. I changed the recipe slightly, increasing the olive oil from 150ml to 200ml, which required an extra 50 grams of flour and produced a slightly softer and glossier dough than usual. By 9:30am this was rising for the required hour prior to shaping the three focaccias. At 11:30am the first two went in the oven for 35 minutes at 230°C, followed by the third. At 3pm the three loaves were each cut into eight portions, bagged and put in the freezer. This was very good timing, because for lunch today I ate the very last piece from the previous batch.

### **Friday 4 December 2015**

I have been wondering why I feel rather footsore and stiff, and it dawned on me this morning that, after six weeks of relative inertia, I have been pretty active lately.

This morning, I needed to collect my repaired denture from the dentist. On the way back we stopped off at The Original Factory shop for a third box of broken biscuits (the chocolate ones), having picked up two for Alistair, Julie and the boys on Wednesday. We had decided that these could come in handy over Christmas. Then we stopped at the Co-op, where I walked round with one of those nifty baskets that you tow behind you – so nothing to lean on, but I still did a full lap of the shop. I picked up some sausages and streaky bacon for the pigs-in-blankets which are always a fe4ature of our Christmas dinner and Boxing Day buffet. By the time we reached the checkout the basket was full. We got in the car to come home and I realised that I hadn't picked up two tins of red salmon and a jar of mayonnaise – essential ingredients for Viv's Salmon Mousse, which I always make as a Christmas dinner starter. I cheerfully got out of the car and went back to buy these. When we got home I took some stuff from the fridge out to the garage freezer while the coffee was heating.

So really it's hardly surprising that my body, accustomed to lying around a lot since the end of September, is finding all this activity a bit of a strain.

Actually, though, the novelty of being mobile hasn't worn off at all. I am thoroughly enjoying the relative independence, and looking forward very much to getting the cast off in two just weeks and three days.

The last little job before tea-time today was to kneel on the bridge over the garden pond, lift out the pump and brush all the garbage off the intake grids, which had become totally clogged. It is such a pleasure to be able to stroll down the garden and back without worrying about slipping or tripping or losing my balance, and to be able to kneel down and get up again.

Finally, I brushed eight chicken wings with maple syrup and roasted them along with some fairly decent oven chips. This produced an awful lot of black cinder on the baking sheet but the wings had a good, slightly sweet flavour. This 'gourmet' meal was wound up with two of Aldi's excellent own-brand versions of the Magnum choc-ice lolly.

### **Saturday 5 December 2015**

I had a lie-in this morning – a slight battle with the aching shoulders and upper arms but nevertheless it was a luxury to stay in bed until 9:15am. It was followed by a fairly lazy day, watching *Saturday Kitchen* and other programmes.

I had a piece of the latest focaccia batch for lunch. Even after freezing and defrosting the bottom crust was really crunchy, with a nice toasted flavour. As I have changed two variables, I'm not sure which is responsible for the improvement, but it is probably the longer bake rather than the extra oil.

I have also experienced waves of mild but sharp pain running down the inside of the left ankle. If I hadn't got the cast on I would be able to prod around with my fingers and check for tenderness, but that is not possible. As far as I can judge, the pain doesn't seem to be in the area of the fusions – more to the front of the ankle – but this is very hard to judge. The waves come quite briefly and then not at all for long periods.

### **Sunday 6 December 2015**

I really wanted a lie-in this morning (what is the matter with me?) but we had decided to go over to Buxton to visit Alistair, Julie and the boys.

We had a really enjoyable visit, minding the lads while Al and Julie went to do a quick handyman job. We left quite early because Pat wanted to avoid driving in the dark, getting home at around 4pm for a lazy evening.

### **Monday 7 December 2015**

I decided yesterday that I should keep a log of nocturnal pees between now and my appointment with the urologist on the 4 January. Last night's were at 12:25am, 3:10am, 5:50am and 8am. The irritating one was the 0550 one, because after getting up at that time I can rarely get back to sleep properly. This was the case this morning, but as often happens I must have been asleep when the 8am call came from my bladder.

Maybe because of the extra strain on the ankle on the visit to Buxton yesterday, the pain I mentioned of Saturday has changed. The inside of the ankle now feels slightly sore all the time and is sensitive to pressure from the cast. I really wish I could give it a prod to get an idea of what is going on!

I am not having any trouble walking on the foot. It feels just as uncomfortable – which is actually *not very* – while sitting. I can't wait to get this cast off so I can give my leg and foot some TLC. I can't believe it doesn't stink! Ah well – just two weeks from today.

## Tuesday 8 December 2015

This morning the intermittent pain in the ankle seemed to have disappeared. We went out to Aldi fairly early and must have spent all of an hour picking up the things we needed and an awful lot that we probably didn't need. But – hey! – it *is* Christmas. We looked at Aldi's selection of Christmas trees but weren't impressed, so from there we moved on to Sainsbury's, who had no trees at all. We spent at least another half-hour picking up the things we needed and which Aldi hadn't had, plus – I am sure – quite a few more than we didn't really need. Then, while Pat went to buy a ticket for today's monster Euro lottery roll-over, I wheeled our spoils down the car park to the car and loaded them into the small amount of space left by the goodies from Aldi. I had parked the rolley and was almost back at the car before Pat emerged from the store.

I was amazed to get through this outing without feeling any distress from the left ankle. In fact, the right one was quite a bit less comfortable.

We were in urgent need of coffee, which I brewed while we were unpacking and stashing the shopping which, somehow, we managed to get out of sight. As it was past our normal lunchtime by now we decided to try some 'French all-butter croissants' which we had bought at Aldi in bags of 8 for just 99p. We weren't very optimistic, so we were pleasantly surprised by the taste and texture once they had been through the oven. With a second cup of coffee (also a good new discovery from Aldi – their Columbian blend – we went out to a local farm shop to buy a Christmas tree.

Once the tree was in the house I went out to the garage to retrieve the ten or so boxes of Christmas decorations, some dating back 20 years. This involved my second encounter with a ladder as everything was stored in the garage loft. To my amazement, I managed to get all the boxes down onto the top of the chest freezer and from there into the house.

To my even greater amazement, the left ankle still was not complaining. I really feel very happy when I am able to do a fair amount of useful work in a day after more than six weeks of being a complete layabout.

I cooked smoked haddock, spinach and a fried egg each (I find poached eggs rather watery) for dinner.

## Wednesday 9 December 2015

I had a lot of shoulder pain through the evening, but I managed to get off the sleep fairly quickly and back to sleep after each loo visit. I got up at 8:15am feeling fairly well rested.

We got most of the decorations done through the day and in between I managed to make two salmon mousses and some hot-smoked salmon, both vacuum-packed and in the freezer by about 3pm. There was rescue job to be done on the conifer in a pot outside the front door and I managed that too.

Then I put all the more-or-less empty boxes back in the garage loft to wait for Twelfth Night.

I found a small sheet of high-density PVC foam in my desk drawer and an ancient but still usable tube of contact adhesive in a drawer in the kitchen. Using my 'THE WORLD'S GREATEST 70-YEAR-OLD' badge kindly sent me by one of the younger generation as a template, I cut out a circle and glued it on the foam lining of the Active Ankle splint. I did this once before but stuck the patch on with a Pritt stick, which turned out not to be the right adhesive for the job. The rivet that provides the hinge for ankle movement has been pressing hard on the point of my outside ankle



bone (the bottom of the fibula) causing quite a lot of discomfort, so I am hoping my second DiY repair will help.

At 9:20am tomorrow I have an appointment with the practice nurse, after (or before) which we are going to rush down to Aldi to try and get a few Gressingham duck crowns for just over £4.00 each – only available from tomorrow. We have had these for several years and they are always good. But I'm usually fit to drive!

### **Thursday 10 December 2015**

We both managed to be awake by 7am this morning, and after a quick cup of tea and a biscuit we drove to Aldi, arriving just five minutes before they opened at 8am.

They had chosen to hide the Gressingham duck crowns, and also the roast-in-bag chickens which we thought might be worth a try at about three quid, at the opposite end of the meat chiller from the rest of the poultry, but we found them with a little help and trolleyed four duck crowns and one chicken-in-a-bag.

Then we started browsing, picking up a lot of stuff we didn't really need and some of the things we did need and had forgotten.

Then a quick drive home for breakfast before I went up to the surgery for my health check. Weight was excessive at nearly 15 stone, but not enough to worry the nurse. My blood pressure was excellent at 126 over seventy-something and my pulse was ticking over in the low seventies. All blood tests are up-to-date (some notified from the Royal Derby, perhaps?) so nothing to do until one or more of my prescriptions need reviewing.

I had picked up four packets of ten excellent own-brand pork chipolatas and three of streaky bacon on our last visit to the Co-op, and spent the rest of the morning making pigs-in-blankets for Christmas dinner and our Boxing Day family gathering. I ran out of bacon, but we went to Eaton's butchers after lunch for Anton's quiches and 3½ kilos of sausage meat for sausage rolls and stuffing. I picked up a dozen more streaky rashers and, when we got back, made the last 20 of the planned 80 pigs.

The real adventure of the day was when I actually managed to climb into the garage loft. I had been very wary of the idea when I went up for the decorations, but we needed something else quite important so I decided to try. Getting from the top of the ladder and stepping onto the floorboards while hanging onto the roof truss – something I normally do without a second thought – was scary, but I managed it. Getting back onto the ladder was worse, but I managed that too. The Big Black Flip-Flop is far from ideal for climbing ladders, but I got away with it.

It is very satisfying to make a little bit more progress on the mobility front every few days. And to look back on the amount of walking I have done this week. This afternoon, on the way back from the butcher's, I happily let Pat drop me off at the ATM and then walked three hundred metres or so down to the hardware shop, then back to the Factory Shop and finally to the car, which Pat had had to park quite a long way from the shops.

Both feet have been protesting at the wear-and-tear they have been subjected to over the past four weeks, and particularly the past one or two. So I was relieved to finish my jobs for the day and rest them. The fused left ankle has been feeling very tender and achy towards the end of the day, but still less uncomfortable than the right one. I have been wondering whether I might be doing some damage with all my antics. And I think I may have had the lower strap on the repaired Active Ankle a little tight.

Eleven days to my next appointment with Mr Milner.

## Friday 11 December 2015

After only three pees through the night I struggled trying to get back to sleep when I got back into bed at 6am. The left shoulder was just painful enough to stop me relaxing, whichever normal sleeping position I tried. Eventually I turned on my back with the left hand resting on the centre of my chest, and the pain faded. I have a bit of a phobia about sleeping this way up, having had a couple of choking incidents some years ago, so when the pain had gone completely I rolled over to try lying on the right side with the painful arm tucked close to my body, and this seemed to work. I came to at just in 8am, feeling quite refreshed, so I got up at what used to be my normal time.

I decided to try managing without the Active Ankle, and by midday – after several trips to the garage and one to the bottom of our long garden, the right ankle was feeling pretty good. By this time I had totally rearranged the outside freezer to accommodate Pat's phenomenal output of mince pies (yesterday) and sausage rolls (this morning). Apart from mild frostbite in just my right ring-finger (really – it took a couple of hours to recover!), I coped fine with this.

The rest of the morning was more restful, devoted to buying and printing two Amazon gift cards, writing and packing a cheque for each of my daughter Sarah's big events (her birthday is on Christmas Eve) and doing a bit of tidying in the study/bedroom.

By mid-afternoon we had about 220 delicious sausage rolls in the freezer along with almost 100 mince pies – also delicious – and my 80 pigs-in-blankets.

Later I spent quite a while trying to find the missing butcher's twine which was causing Pat so much grief. How can things disappear completely? We seem to have lost a whole box or bag of bits we use when wrapping presents.

Pat tried going up the ladder to the garage loft, on the assumption that her body is in better nick than mine. She succeeded in proving that assumption wrong, so I went up and stuck my head through the hatch and had an other good scan around nothing.

The right ankle has been twingeing a little after most of a day without any artificial support, but it is far more comfortable than it was at the end of yesterday, when it had the 'benefit' of the Active Ankle splint all day. The left one, which was feeling fairly dodgy yesterday evening is also feeling a lot better.

Tomorrow my daughter Sarah with her husband (who has the misfortune to be named David Cameron) and my stepson Steve with his wife Sue and an unknown number of daughters (maximum two) are coming up for the annual present exchange. This time, they are treating *us* to a meal at our local pub.

My last real job for the day was to vacuum round everywhere downstairs apart from the kitchen, which had been turned into a present-wrapping station, mainly for presents for tomorrow's visitors.

Apart from that, I only had to roast a tray of chicken wings and another of frozen French fries, and then find a couple of Aldi choc-ice lollies for afters, for our picnic dinner in front of the TV.

## Saturday 12 December 2015

Last night I had five trips to the loo and after the 6am one, as usual, I found it very difficult to get comfortable. I think I must have managed some sleep as I didn't get up until after 9am.

Straight after breakfast I vacuumed the kitchen. The left ankle was aching a little, so it occurred to me that I should treat it gently over next weekend to avoid a reprimand from Mr Milner for mistreating his handiwork. The problem is that I had no guidance for the second six weeks of rehab – just 'full weight bearing' which could mean

anything from standing on the one leg for a few minutes each day or, as I interpreted it, getting as nearly back to normal living as possible. Climbing ladders might be considered a little ambitious, so I had better keep quiet about that at the hospital.

We spent much of the afternoon waiting for Sarah and Steve+family to arrive. Sarah and Dave were held up on the A1 by what sounded like a horrific and probably fatal accident, so we only had a relatively short time before going off the pub for about 5pm booking.

It was lovely with eight of us sitting at a big round table in the pub, enjoying what was a very good meal for all of us. I had a whole Le Rustique camembert baked with sweet onion jam inside, served on a bed of leaves with some crusty baguette slices, followed by a sizzling crispy beef dish with a huge mound of noodles which soon defeated me. None of us had any appetite for dessert so we went back to our place for tea and mince pies.

We were quite weary, so after the first half of *The Bridge* we decided to hit the sack.

### **Sunday 13 December 2015**

I had a lazy morning while Pat went out for an extended gift shopping trip. When she got back we watched the rest of *The Bridge* over coffee. There has been a lot of present-wrapping going on in the front bedroom while I have been writing this.

I cooked a really nice Aldi 28-day aged rib-eye steak for us to share, with sauté potatoes and onions, with frozen peas, after which Pat continued her wrapping until about 8pm.

### **Monday 14 December 2015**

Rather a good night for me. As usual I got off to sleep quickly after a read, but *unusually* I only woke up for two pees – at 2:20am and 5:30am. I couldn't get off to sleep again after the second – maybe because I had had much more uninterrupted sleep than I have become used to – and at 7:45am, when I could feel another pee approaching, I decided to get up.

Two pees was good, but the real news is that I lay in bed for well over two hours, in my favourite position, with no pain and only a little discomfort from the shoulders. Does this mean they are actually recovering at last? (The right one was protesting while I typed this, and I had a curious 'seized-up' feeling around my left shoulder-blade while watching the 9am TV news, so let's not count too many chickens!)

I haven't worn the Active Ankle splint on the right ankle for at least three days now, and it remains far less painful than it did when I was wearing the thing all day and every day. There is a general dull ache in the foot, with occasional sharper twinges, but it feels a hell of a lot better than it should, having had to play 'the good ankle' for the six weeks until I started using the left foot, and considering that it looked so dreadful on the last x-ray that Mr Milner wanted to fuse it before the left one.

This morning I finally gave in to Pat and wrote the few Christmas cards I send – I usually leave them much later and we still have almost two weeks until Christmas. She took them with her when she left for Anton's, leaving me searching for an email giving change-of-address information for one very old friend. I found it in my *Outlook* archive inbox and wrote and stamped the one remaining card.

I printed off a recipe for Chinese pancakes (the ones that come with crispy aromatic duck) but decided not to both making any just yet. I might just before Christmas so we can make the leftovers from the duck more interesting. I also looked at a recipe for sausage-meat and chestnut stuffing, which turned out to be pretty well what I expected. I decided to get this made, cooked and frozen pretty today.

After lunch we decided to get rid of all the bottles and jars in the overflowing crate by the bins, so that we would have somewhere to put the Christmas empties. We decided to combine this with a three other errands – the library so Pat could take her finished books back, the Post Office so I could post a card that wasn't ready when Pat took the rest with her this morning, and the Co-op for just four essential items – a list that inevitably got bloated with ingredients for tiramisu and various other bits. When we got to the village bottle bank there were bottles sticking out of the holes, but the nice checkout lady at the Co-op told us there was one in the next village up the road. So that was a productive half-hour.

As an experiment we are having a chicken which arrives in a roasting bag (Aldi) – just stick on a tray and roast for 90 minutes. I bought one like this from the Co-op a few weeks ago but didn't spot that it was cook-in-the-bag until I had opened it. We have used roasting bags very successfully for chickens and hams in the past. I will be using one for our Boxing Day gammon joint.

I recently got an email from LinkedIn from which I finally found out what Claire Stevens's title is (see the start of this epic): Arthroplasty Practitioner. Google revealed that '*arthroplasty is a surgical procedure to restore the integrity and function of a joint. A joint can be restored by resurfacing the bones. An artificial joint (called a prosthesis) may also be used.*' So now I know. My fusion doesn't qualify as the joint is totally destroyed rather than restored, so maybe she shouldn't talk to me...

One week to my hospital appointment...

## **Tuesday 15 December 2015**

I had probably my best night's sleep for months, with three trips to the loo (at 2:05am, 3:20am and 5:30am) but no wakeful periods afterwards and only waking up enough to check the time shortly before 8am. I have no recollection of any problems with shoulder pain through the night. I was fairly late getting my head down – around 11:45pm – because I had started a new James Lee Burke book, so this may have helped. Maybe I should force myself to read longer, because this got me more-or-less a full 8 hours of sleep.

I am finding walking around on the thick bedroom carpet without the 'flip-flop' a little difficult: I have to take short steps to avoid stressing the left foot. I get the same sharp pain on the inside of the ankle when I get out of bed as I do when standing up from my recliner, but not when getting up from a dining chair. It happens for the first two or three steps and then goes away. This may be because the support from the 'flip-flop' isn't there, but why it happens with it on when I stand up from the recliner I have no idea – unless it's because I have usually been sitting for far longer than I do anywhere else...?

Today is a clear day with nothing scheduled, which is great because I really want to watch 'Major Tim' taking off for the International Space Station (great to see Europe, Russia and the US working together so well regardless of their politicians' bickering!).

The theory above is now confirmed. I just got up from the recliner to collect the post, having been sitting for about 15 minutes, and there was no pain in the ankle at all, so time is the issue: if I sit for a long time something changes in the ankle which is corrected by taking a few steps. Very odd...

After lunch, just for a change and because the ankles were feeling pretty good, I went outside and split a few logs with the felling axe. It's a pity Craig didn't cut the chopping block so it provided a level surface. I could do with some wedges to level it.

Flushed with success, and having had a difficult search for a can of soup in the dark side of our kitchen pull-out, I wondered if I could manage to replace the halogen bulb in the downlight that would improve the view. I discovered that I only had to stand on

the first step of our little two-rung stepladder, and I managed to lever the whole lamp fitting out of its hole in the ceiling, in spite of the frighteningly strong spring-clips that held it in the ceiling. The lamp dropped on the end of its cable, enabling me to twist it out of its GU10 holder once I had got the wire retaining clip out, juggle the new one in (it was quite fiddly getting the prongs into the slots) and finally push the fitting back into the ceiling, holding the spring-clips so that they went through the hole with the fitting – no mean feat! Another job done in spite of my ankles!

My last job for the day was to strip the carcass of the roast-in-the-bag chicken, which had been a little overcooked for my taste, heat the meat up with Patak's Jalfrezi sauce and boil some Uncle Ben's long grain rice, all of which came out very well.

### **Wednesday 16 December 2015**

A restless night thanks to a painful shoulder, probably aggravated by helping Pat to turn the front bedroom *into* a bedroom instead of the girt-wrapping emporium it has been for the past couple of weeks. Among other things, this involved me manhandling a very large basket full of wrapping materials out of the room, which was very difficult because we have one more wardrobe in there than the room can really hold, leaving a very narrow (430mm) gap between the open door and one of said wardrobes: the basket is 600mm long, 450mm wide and 250mm deep, so I had to tip it up on one end (trying to avoid tipping too much stuff out) and thread it through the gap. I managed this with difficulty but my right shoulder protested violently, and is still painful this morning.

To balance the restlessness from the pain, I only got up for two pees. I woke up around 7:30am and was downstairs in time for the 8 o'clock news. I had breakfast laid by the time Pat came down and by 9:30am had put on a pan of prunes to cook, handwashed the breakfast pots because the dishwasher needed emptying, emptied the dishwasher and taken a couple of clean jam-jars out to the garage.

The strange ankle-pains during the first three steps after I get up from a chair are still happening, but I am walking easily, normally – even energetically! – and painlessly once I get going. The right ankle is still feeling reasonable without the splint – nowhere near as disabling as the left one was before the surgery, so my decision to have the left one done first was definitely right.

Now, at 9:45am, I am waiting for Pat to go out to her annual Christmas lunch with her closest girlfriends so that I can wrap her presents (of which one has yet to arrive from Amazon).

The last of Pat's presents had not arrived by 3:45pm, but the rest are wrapped, tagged and hidden in the study cupboard.

The rest of the day so far has been accounted for by finishing the stock from the chicken-in-a-bag cooking and boxing a pack of prunes for my breakfasts. With this out of the way I decided to investigate *Netflix*, which grandson Barney assures me is the best of the video streaming services. I was thinking about an Amazon Fire Stick until I remembered that we already have the rather dubious Android box I bought a while ago and which is still plugged into HDMI2 on our TV. I went online and decided to try a one-month free trial. Once the account was set up I had no trouble downloading the Netflix app from the Google PlayStore onto the dodgy-box and it started working with no problems. I was able to watch the pilot episode of *Breaking Bad*, which everyone in the family has been raving about and which I quite enjoyed. The functionality of the box, with either of the two remote controllers, is fiddly but I have managed to do everything I wanted to so far. I can't say I am thrilled with the content on *Netflix* but there is quite a lot of stuff I could bear watching.

## Thursday 17 December 2015

I had been struggling to get comfortable with my shoulders for quite a long time when the bladder demanded attention at 7:40am. I decided to get up rather than logging this as a nocturnal pee (third or fourth – I need to check the log), so I did the toe and ankle exercises in bed and was downstairs with ablutions completed in time for the 8 o'clock news on Radio 4. The right ankle was slightly uncomfortable when I got down. I did a careful set of neck and shoulder exercises while my tea was cooling.

Only four more days in the cast!

I spent most of the afternoon wrestling with Microsoft *Outlook*, having decided that it is probably time to shut down my website and email domains (which would, for a while at least, eliminate most of the junk email I get every day). I already have a working Gmail account, so I decided to try adding it to *Outlook* as a second account. Bad move – most of the afternoon was wasted trying to get Gmail to work and eventually, in desperation, trying to delete it. I had resigned myself to deleting as much of the Gmail setup as it would allow and tomorrow morning uninstalling *Office* and reinstalling it in the hope that an incomplete setup would simply be ignored.

## Friday 18 December 2015

I had a decent night's sleep, with three pees but no long periods awake, and when I woke up shortly after 7am wanting pee number 4 and with mild but irritating pain the the shoulders I felt reasonably rested, so I decided to get up and tackle the ailing PC.

When I fired it up, *Outlook* allowed me to delete the Gmail account without a hiccup – there's nothing like a power-down reset for clearing the decks. Back to square one, then...

Pat drove me up the road to the dentist to collect my repaired denture. On the way back we did another quick raid on the Co-op, as usual buying quite a bit more than we had on our list.

Later I salvaged 230 grams of leftover egg-whites from the back of the fridge and made a batch of meringue – *meringue française* to Michel Roux Senior's recipe. The Kitchen Aid Artisan mixer I bought us as a joint Christmas present did the job beautifully, smoothly and quietly compared with the old Kenwood Chef we inherited from Pat's late mother. The *meringue* ring and its lid came out of the oven just in time to make room for tonight's dinner of chicken wings.

To my relief Pat's last present arrived from Amazon this afternoon, following the failure of Debenhams to supply it.

The funny ankle twinges I was getting when getting up from long sit-downs seem to have stopped. I can operate on my feet for extended periods now without any serious discomfort, as witness the cooking. I have all sorts of odds and ends I need to go out for, and I am starting to believe that once Monday is over I will be able to drive myself.

## Saturday 19 December 2015

I was restless after my second pee at 5am but got back to sleep eventually. I woke for another at around 7am, toyed with the idea of getting up early and, as I was quite comfortable, decided that I would have a Saturday lie-in. I ended up dozing until towards 9am.

Saturday and Sunday breakfasts are usually porridge but, as the temperature was unseasonably high – around 15°C – and I got my teeth back yesterday, I decided on cereal and had my usual muesli and yogurt.

The rest of the morning was spent watching foodie TV and, towards lunchtime, paying my credit-card bills online. I remembered that I hadn't refreshed my sourdough since the last bake, so I did this and then went to the garage to check whether we had any French Muscat which we might have brought back from France – and found a treasure: Muscat de Mireval 15.5% (the strength of a dry sherry but achieved without fortification), probably bought in Southern France around 15 years ago – I have a dim recollection of stopping at a *produits regionnaux* shop in the middle of nowhere and buying this when I was researching my wine articles for *Living France* magazine. The amazing thing is that the bottle had been opened quite a while ago and about a third of the wine used, but the other two-thirds has kept perfectly with only a little residual vacuum from the VacUVin stopper! Apparently, if you can find a bottle of this wine anywhere it will cost about £34. Nevertheless, I intend using some in my *tiramisu* for Boxing Day. I am really thrilled as well as amazed!

After lunch I scanned, enhanced, resized, cropped (slightly) and printed the cover of an antique cookery magazine (1912, price 1d if you know what that means) for Pat to stick in a personalised cookery book for her niece Becky – a stimulating half-hour's work with *PhotoShop*. Then I had a trip down to the summer-house to get a box of the grandkids' out of the way and to look for two books about the possibilities of space travel which my Dad bought back in the 1950s. I had just about admitted defeat when I spotted them on a bottom shelf behind some junk. To my amazement they were in very good condition – cold and clammy but not actually damp, and with that unmistakable aroma that only old books have. They are now in the utility room, by far the warmest and driest space in the house.

It has become obvious that this diary is no longer mainly focussed on my health problems: it is increasingly a celebration of the things I can now do which I had not been able to do during most of my three-month rehabilitation period. I hope that Monday's entry and those that follow will be even more celebratory as the cast comes off and I start *driving* again. I have lots of odd bits of shopping to get done next week and I would just love to be able to do them without relying on poor Pat.

## Monday 21 December 2015

At last – patience is rewarded. The great day has arrived. In about 90 minutes we will be setting out for the Royal Derby Hospital.

Meanwhile, by the time Pat came down for breakfast I had completed the first stages of making another batch of yogurt, and in one of the 30-minute waiting times I went up and changed our bedding – the big one this week, with a celebratory duvet cover on for Christmas. This is something of a wrestle with our down quilt in full winder mode (despite this insanely warm weather) and the heavier of the two covers.

In spite of four pees – and the excitement of the day, I had a decent night's sleep.

We left at 11:50am for my 2pm appointment, getting to the hospital shortly after 1pm in spite of the ongoing road 'works' (can anyone be seen actually working?) on the M1. This gave us time for a coffee and a sandwich in the main Costa café near the main entrance. We checked in at the clinic at around 12:45pm and waited to be called – in my case very impatiently. To my astonishment I was called at 1:58:30 – a minute and a half before the appointment.

We went straight to the plaster room where my elegant blue plastic cast was sawn into sections for removal. The vibrations of the saw triggered some really weird reflexive movements in my left leg with their strange high-frequency tickling. Eventually the pieces were lifted off to reveal a revoltingly scaly, flaking, dried-up mess of a lower leg. To my surprise I didn't detect any smell, but Pat said she could get a typical, if not very strong, sweaty feet aroma.

I was transferred to a wheelchair as I was not allowed to weightbear without the cast until the doctors had seen the x-rays. The wait in the x-ray department seemed interminable, but eventually we were installed in one of the clinic's examination rooms and joined almost immediately, and disappointingly, by one of Mr Milner's team, who seemed to make heavy weather of reading my notes before displaying the x-rays – impressive images showing the thick titanium rod up the inside of my tibia and the three bolts holding it in place. After a while Mr Milner came in and explained that I should treat the foot cautiously but that I could walk on it. They would need to see another x-ray in three months, as the join between the tibia and the talus was not yet completely bonded. There was talk of using one or two crutches, more for confidence than anything else, but this turned out not be necessary.

Mr Milner was still keen to talk about the right ankle. I insisted that I would need to get the left leg fit to be 'the good leg' and also suggested next August rather than September to give me a month longer to get ready for Christmas.

Then we were left for a little while and I grabbed the opportunity to take a couple of pictures of my x-ray on my smartphone.

For reasons that were never made clear, the nurse came in and put a long pieve of Tubigrip on the left foot and lower leg.

So far I have resisted the urge to include pictures in this diary, but as the ankle is the star of the story I have decided to make this one exception, which clearly shows the rod and the three bolts anchoring it in place through the talus and tibia. I can't see any sign of a screw in the heel bone, which is strange as the bar goes right through it. I am also a little surprised that the fibula – the thin bone on the right – has just been left unattached at the bottom.

I hope this is not infringing the hospital's copyright – it shouldn't, because it *is* my leg....



We escaped from the clinic to get to the splint workshop five minutes before my 3pm appointment. By 3.:30pm I was getting pretty fed up of waiting, but when I announced



that we needed to get home they managed to squeeze me in. I now have a splint similar to to Active Ankle but without the hinge, though it still allows the ankle to bend. This was tailor-made for my right ankle. As I have not been wearing the Active Ankle for several days, I don't expect to need the new splint all the time, but it will be ready if the ankle becomes painful.

While we were waiting to see the occupational therapist I decided I needed to pee, and discovered that I could actually walk on the left foot without too much grief. However, when we left I decided to err on the side of caution and get Pat to wheel me back to the main entrance. Then, while she went to pay the exorbitant parking fee, I walked carefully back to the car. On the way home we needed milk, so she parked at our little local shopping precinct and I walked the 50 or so metres to the shop, used the ATM, went to the opposite corner to collect two 2-litre bottles of semi-skimmed, went back to the checkout, bought some lottery tickets and returned to the car.

It was a great relief to be home after over six hours, so after a much-needed cup of tea I went to the bathroom to try and clean the leg up. Sitting on the loo-seat, I immersed the foot in a bidet filled with warm water and washed it thorough with coal-tar soap, which I always think smells very antiseptic. A great deal of flaky skin came off, and I discovered that the only bit of the foot that has caused any real discomfort (a combination of itching and tenderness), on the back of the heel, was a large scab presumably formed over of the sutured incisions. Quite a lot of this had washed off. I finished the job with a generous application of 'Bottle o' Butter' moisturiser and when I got my footwear back on it felt much more comfortable.

The foot is quite painful to walk on, but I think the pain is from the joints between all of the smaller bones of the ankle and foot which have been immobilised by the cast for three months and have naturally become very still. Obviously asking them to start working again after such a long time is a tall order! I hope spells of rest and exercise will soon loose them up.

It is 8:30pm now and as I sit at my desk the foot is pretty well painless.

## **Tuesday 22 December 2015**

I had a long wakeful period between pees at 4:30am and 6am thanks to a niggly shoulder, but manage and hour or so's sleep and woke up shortly before 8am. I decided to get up, and really enjoyed being without the cast and the Big Black Flip-Flop – just the Tubigrip invading my simple socks and soft old Reebok trainers.

It was time to get some more food prep done, so I went for rum sauce, savoury white sauce and chipolatas. This meant I had to walk over to the shops for whole milk. I took a crutch with me as a precaution but didn't use it. However, by the time I got back, the foot (but not the ankle!) was pretty painful. Nevertheless, by midday I had both sauces in containers and the sausages cooling to join the pigs-in-blankets in the outside freezers. A short coffee break soon eased the pain, and I am now hoping that exercise with short periods of rest will get the bones loosened up and the pain controlled.

With so much time on my feet, the 'little bones' have been protesting quite loudly when I walk but, interesting, they didn't seem to mind at all when I decided to try declutching in the car. The experience was so painless that I decided to switch the engine on and was able to turn the car round – no mean feat in our rather cramped forecourt – with my foot in its normal, natural position on the clutch pedal and with perfect control and not even a hint of discomfort. So there is no reason why I won't be able to do a safe emergency stop and therefore no reason why I shouldn't start driving straight away. If the weather is a little more clement tomorrow morning I will try taking the car ar0ound the block a few times.

This means that I will be able to go shopping by myself rather than having to ask Pat to drive me – freedom at last!

The next positive step was to have a long, luxurious shower – *without* the cold, clammy plastic 'leg-condom'. That was sheer joy. I was able to use my body-scrubber (the thing like a ball of screwed-up net curtaining) to scour some of the huge flakes of loose skin off the lower leg, although I was amazed how many was left when I dried the leg.

My balance felt fine in the shower and, amazingly, I was able to stand on the bad foot while balancing with one hand on the shower mixer and give the other foot a good scrub. Then, on the way out of the shower, I found it easy to dry my legs and feet the way I did before the operation, by laying the end of the towel on the loo-seat cover and putting one foot up on it. I could do this equally easily with both legs.

Finally, I sat down on the seat cover and gave the flaky leg another good basting with 'Bottle o' Butter' moisturiser.

Not quite finally, because when I took the elastic stocking bandage off I shed loads of skin flakes onto our lovely thick bedroom carpet, so that last job was to haul the vacuum cleaner out of the eaves loft and vac them all up.

### **Wednesday 23 December 2015**

I had a good night, with two pees and a call for the third shortly after 7am. I made it wait and got up at 7:30am, so it was officially a tw-pee night.

We headed out to Tickhill at around 8:45am but found our butcher already had people queueing out of the door. The atmosphere was pleasant, though, with people we could chat to. We set out with a hefty half-gammon, a large pork pie, a somewhat smaller pork, leek and stilton pie, a dozen rashers of streaky bacon and a dozen eggs.

Pat went into the garden centre at Welbeck while I went to the farm shop. It was like I had never seen it before with a queue for the butchery counter that went right round the shop and out of the door. Luckily I was only after cheese, so I got served very quickly. I also bought two beautiful little crumble-topped tartlets, one with rhubarb and Bramley apple and the other with blackberry and Bramble. Miraculously, we arrived back at the car within a minute of one another (I had stopped for the Gents in the Harley Gallery).

Next stop Asda, where we filled a trolley pretty full, and then Sainsbury's where we filled a smaller trolley equally full. We got home at about 12:30pm, and were visited for an hour or so by my stepson Aidan and Bailey the dog (my bedmate early in my rehab programme). Since then we have been doing various food-related jobs, mine including sorting out the drinks in the garage and transferring many many sausage rolls from a large rigid container to two plastic bags to create more space in the freezer, and are now (5:30pm) pretty well on top of everything – except that I/we forgot the brussels sprouts and orange squash for the kids! We got some really nice-looking little Chantenay carrots from Sainsbury's, though.

At 7pm I finished peeling about five pounds of rather elderly potatoes for Pat to make leek and potato soup. The legs stood up to half an hour at the sink very well but the shoulders got quite painful towards the end. I thought that the kitchen bin was nearly full, I went out to collect the wheelie-bin from where I had left it outside the side gate this morning. Having binned the peelings, of which there was quite a pile, I discovered that the bin was only about three-quarters full.

## Thursday 24 December 2015

After what seemed like very little sleep thanks to a sore shoulder, I drove the car for the first time – only up to the village Co-op and back, but with no problems whatever. Even when I inadvertently declutched with the ball of my foot rather than the instep on the pedal, there was no strain or discomfort at all. This really is the best news since the cast came off, because it means that I can 'pop out' to the shops without disrupting Pat.

The rest of the morning and the first half of the afternoon were devoted to food preparation, so I was on my feet almost all the time. They were not exactly comfortable, but I never felt the need to sit down. Things are definitely getting better.

Flushed with success from the morning drive, I took us across to pick up Anton in Sheffield, took him and Pat to the Co-op for his inevitable shopping, took us all to sister-in-law Jackie's to deliver presents and goodies and finally, via Ka-China to collect our takeaway dinner, home. No problems, despite much of the drive being in the dark and the wet. I really am back in business!

## Friday 25 December 2015

Very much our usual Christmas Day, with Buck's Fizz and croissants for breakfast followed by present-opening. Pat was very pleased with my gifts, as I was in my turn: a new Casio radio-controlled solar-powered watch to replace my failing one, which now only tells the time (until it needs a new battery). This one is all-titanium. I also got three Keith Richards gifts – a book, a CD and a DVD, so I was really happy. I managed to find out how to remove links from the bracelet (no less than three needed to come out) and get the watch to set the time from the atomic clock transmitter by just after dinner, eyes straining to read the tiny print in the tiny instruction manual. It is now set up to do this automatically every day so it will always be insanely (but entertainingly) accurate.

I spent the whole afternoon finalising dinner, which we thoroughly enjoyed. Tomorrow we have a dozen or so family coming in the afternoon, so more food prep to do after my first solo drive to the Co-op for fresh bread...

## Monday 28 December 2015

Christmas is all over, with little time for diary entries. For the Boxing Day festivities, I decided to put my two white ProSport ankle supports on and they seemed to help on a day when I had few opportunities to sit down until about 8pm when most of our guests had gone.

The only disaster was my tiramisu, made from a *Guardian* recipe described as 'the best in the world'. Followed to the letter it produced a very sloppy topping that showed no sign whatever of setting. Most of it went down the loo!

Otherwise, I coped well with the day's catering, but by the end both feet were killing me! I came to the conclusion that the ProSports were a bit tight. I tried them again this morning but the support still felt too aggressive. I am now wearing one of the old neoprene ProSports on the left ankle and nothing on the right. When I get up from a long sit-down the left ankle still feels very painful for the first few steps but as before it soon calms down and I can walk fairly normally.

I am writing this at just after 2pm, and I cannot believe that it is just a week, almost to the hour, since the cast was taken off. I have felt discouraged at times, but on reflection I realise that I have come a long way in a week. I have stayed on my feet for hours at a stretch while preparing, cooking and serving food and then socialising with guests, without too much trouble at the time but being punished fairly hard later!

The shoulders are still giving trouble but I am sleeping a lot better, with no more than two nocturnal pees for each of the last few nights.

To my surprise there are still some small scabs at the end of Mr Milner's incision scars which are big enough and hard enough to dig in when pressed by a shoe. I keep meaning to put plasters on them but I also keep forgetting.

We had a day of ancient movies today – *Ivanhoe*, starring (for me) the delicious young Elizabeth Taylor among others, in the morning and *Spartacus*, starring (again, for me) the equally delicious Jean Simmons., for almost four hours in the afternoon. Pizza and Christmas cake provided all the necessary nourishment.

## **Tuesday 29 December 2015**

When I got up this morning at about 7:45am, having done the toe, ankle and knee exercises in bed, there was very little discomfort in the left foot, but after walking and sitting around for a while wearing the neoprene ProSport support over my sock it began to feel a little more tender. Maybe I should stop using artificial supports and let the foot fend for itself.

I took the support off before going out for a haircut, and felt just as comfortable driving and walking as I had with it on. My gait seemed fairly normal and I was able to keep up a reasonable pace. I think I just have to put up with mild discomfort and rest the foot for a while if it becomes really *uncomfortable*.

## **Friday 1 January 2016**

Nothing much to report over the past few days except that the left foot continues to be uncomfortable. Yesterday and today I have used the Tubigrip bandage provided by the hospital without instructions as to how long I should wear it, and the foot hasn't been too bad. The lower leg is very swollen, though – I don't know how long I should put up with this before getting some advice.

We took Anton home yesterday morning and then went to Crystal Peaks, the big retail park on our side of Sheffield, in the hopes of picking up one of M&S's ready-meal packages, but the parking situation was just insane so we came back to Worksop to visit its much-smaller Markies. Sadly, by that time the Coquilles St-Jacques (scallops on the shell with mashed potato and cheese sauce) had all gone, as had most of the other meals we fancied. Still, we had some quite decent food – a mushroom Stroganoff for Pat and a chicken and mushroom Stroganoff for me. I should have gone with the vegetarian, like Pat, so that I would get more mushrooms and no chicken-breast (a form of meat which I would cheerfully abolish given the chance!).

We stayed up until well after midnight to see in the New Year, which I had to do with a large whisky because Pat's acidosis meant it wasn't not worth opening a bottle of Prosecco. Three cheers for London, going ahead with a huge firework display that clearly shouted 'Up yours, ISIS!'

Today, I decided, we needed to have a decent hot meal, so I am cooking a huge casserole of slowly braised oxtail, ox cheek and beef skirt, all from the farmer with the Dexter herd from Retford Farmers' Market. We have plenty of leftover mash from Christmas dinner and I am slow-cooking red cabbage with loads of added stuff.

## **Sunday 3 January 2016**

Yesterday was a very lazy day, partly because my left foot was really painful. After driving up to the Co-op with a very short shopping list (from which, for once, I did not deviate), I spent most of the rest of the day in stockinged feet, which I found far more comfortable than wearing my faithful old Reebok trainers. I only put the shoes back on the climb the iron spiral staircase – definitely *not* a job for bare or stockinged feet!

We were assisted in our desire for a lazy day by the discovery of a TV channel called 'Drama', which was showing a TV serial production of *Pride and Prejudice* followed by PD James's very good sequel about a murder at Pamberley and a less rewarding movie adaptation of *Withering Heights*. Then it was back to BBC4 for the new series of *The Young Montalbano*.

This morning the feet felt quite a lot better, and I was able to walk up to the shops for the paper with only minor discomfort, mainly on the top of the instep and running down towards the toes. Around midday, though, I had a really strange pain in the second toe of the left (operated-on) foot. It felt exactly as if someone was pushing a needle into the side of the top knuckle joint – a totally convincing skin pain. Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, it vanished completely after about 15 minutes. A nerve damaged by Mr Milner healing? Or what?

Wearing the trainers, unlaced, for some but not all of the time, the left foot has continued to feel quite a lot better than it has for the past few days, in spite of its trip to the shops earlier. I hope the improvement will continue.

Tomorrow morning, I finally get to see a urologist, as I was recommended to do by Mr Milner ahead of September's surgery in the light of last year's post-anaesthetic urine retention episode.

### **Monday 4 January 2016**

We had quite a hectic morning – and a very good one indeed from my point of view. We arrived at Bassetlaw hospital just before 10am and I was called for my 10:15am appointment at exactly 10:05am by the consultant, Mr Avill himself, whose consulting room turned out to adjoin outpatient reception. After asking me a few questions based on what the NHS's electronic patient record system must have told him – the even knew about The Great Bladder Explosion of the 5 September 2014 – took me into a second room to check my prostate – the third finger-up-the-bottom in under three years and for the nurse to scan my bladder. He already had the record of my recent blood tests, both from Derby and our GP practice, so he knew my last prostate-specific antigen test was fine and, either based on the scan or on recent tests, that my kidney function was fine too. The amount of urine the scanner found in my bladder was just right for someone who had had a pee less than an hour ago. The question was whether I could continue to put up with the interrupted sleep: if not, surgery was an option. Having heard our friend John's horror stories, particularly the transurethral resection of his prostate which I assume was what Mr Avill had on offer, and having had more than my fill of surgery recently, I assured him that I had learnt to get myself back to sleep almost at once after a pee – even one involving the torch and the notepad.

I left the hospital very reassured.

We discussed possibilities in the car and one was to reduce the amount I drink in the evening – usually a mug of tea and a glass of milk between dinner and bed. Maybe I should try reducing this – perhaps stopping the tea first as I really enjoy my ice-cold glass of semi-skimmed at bedtime, but possibly also halving the quantity of milk.

We went straight to visit Anton after the hospital. He was quite cheerful and seemed really happy to be back home. We took him shopping and Pat put in his eye-drops, and then we went to the Welbeck gift shop (having found Creswell Craggs closed except at weekends in winter). She found some birthday presents for the younger grandsons, and we finally got home for a coffee-cum-lunch snack around 2pm.

As I have for almost two weeks now, I did all the driving.

After lunch I had my fortnightly wrestling match with our quilt, sheets and pillowcases and was glad to settle down for a lazy afternoon and evening.

My last task of the day was to convert the remaining beef stew from Saturday's dinner into a rich soup with the dumplings Pat had made for Sunday, by sieving out the remaining meat, which had become tough and fibrous after too many warm-ups, and extending the gravy with vegetable stock made with the wonderful Marigold Vegetable Bouillon powder which we use in almost every savoury dish we cook. The result was delicious, as were the last remains of the Christmas pudding.

## **Tuesday 5 January 2016**

Famous last words! My assurance to Mr Avill that I could cope with waking up several times a night to pee came back to haunt me this morning. I got up at 1:45am and went straight back to sleep, but after getting up again at 4:15am I lay awake for a very long time. I probably got off again around 6am and woke at around 8am feeling quite weary.

The usual exercises (toes, ankle, knees, neck and shoulders) and two mugs of tea pulled me together again and I have had quite a productive morning sorting out this month's money. We – or rather I – spent rather a lot of money on Christmas, but I'm going to be able to hold things together through January and make a fresh start in February provided no unforeseen problems crop up.

The left ankle is still moderately uncomfortable at times, but I'm convinced that progress is being made: by mid-afternoon today it was virtually pain-free! I have even started thinking about starting early-morning walks again – but not just yet.

I decided to try some measures recommended to help elderly gentlemen with benign prostate enlargement. We had our evening cup of tea soon after dinner and I skipped my customary milk. To my disgust, I woke five times through the night to pee. It looks as if I am just going to have to be content that I can usually get back to sleep straight away after visiting the loo. Only visits at around 4am cause real problems.

## **Wednesday 6 January 2016**

Today being Twelfth Night, it was time to take down all our Christmas decorations.

The last box went up into the garage loft just before 2pm. I lost count of how many times I went up and down the old (I worked out that it must be almost 50 years old) Black & Decker three-way stepladder, pushing boxes before me on each ascent, but my bones in general and my left foot in particular confirmed that the number must have been pretty high. Reassuringly, the pain soon started to fade, so things were obviously holding together quite well.

Well enough, I hoped, to enable me to walk up to the shops for some milk.

But, by the time I had bought four litres of milk from the OneStop Shop and gone into the chemist's shop, I was quite pleased to hear that they were overwhelmed with prescriptions and running late and could have a ten-minute sit down. By the time I got home all I wanted was to sit down again. The sole of my left foot felt as if it had been battered with a hammer, which is, of course, exactly what Mr Milner had done to it back at the end of September.

A cup of tea and some Christmas cake and cheese later, it was already feeling better, and I was fairly confident that a good night's sleep would have it back to what passes for normal these days.

By the end of the day the left foot was quite sore, but as I was still feeling pretty exhausted I thought the good night's sleep should be guaranteed.

## **Thursday 7 January 2016**

My mistake! I was wakened for the night's second pee at around 4:15am and, as usual when I am awake at that time, I found it very difficult to get back to sleep. Or,

rather, *impossible* to get back to sleep. I was still awake at 6am, having been brooding over a problem that was actually no problem at all – which is what usually happens under these circumstances. From then on I must have cat-napped because the time passed quite quickly, and I eventually decided to get up at 9:15am.

I was not alone in being very tired after yesterday's efforts: Pat didn't even stir while I was getting dressed, and didn't appear downstairs until 10:15am.

The good news is that the left foot was feeling quite good this morning, so the combination of high-stress exercise (including repeated ascents of the ladder!) followed by a decent rest seems to do it more good than harm.

### **Saturday 7 January 2016**

Following Wednesday night's experience I tried an experiment: I would carefully avoid seeing the clock when I got up for a pee, in the hope that 4am-anxiety would not kick in just because it was expected. On Thursday night it seemed to have worked perfectly: I guessed that I had visited the loo five or six times but had got back to sleep quickly every time. Could it be that simple?

The short answer is 'No!'. I repeated the experiment last night, after a really tiring 100-mile two-way drive to and from Buxton with the journey home in pitch darkness on damp country roads with the temperature hivering around zero. To my disgust, I still had a long period awake in the small hours.

The good news is that I had managed the two drives with no trouble, the left foot controlling the clutch very smoothly. I went to the loo a lot in Buxton, which meant negotiating Alistair's long, steep staircase up and down several times, which I did quite well.

Today has been quite lazy for two rather weary grandparents, watching foodie stuff this morning and two fairly silly movies this afternoon.

### **Monday 11 January 2016**

Sunday was pretty lazy, too, with only cooking roast chicken, roast potatoes, frozen peas and tinned corn (plus gravy-making) for exercise.

I am fairly sure I slept right through the night. I have no recollection of getting up for a pee or lying awake at all. This is incredible – something that has not happened to me for a long time.

Once downstairs I wished I had gone back to sleep. Hearing a medley of David Bowie clips playing on the *Today* programme worried me, and the announcement that (for me) the greatest artist as both writer and performer of the rock/pop era had died at the young age of 69 a few days after releasing a new album, reduced me to floods of tears. When she came into the kitchen, Pat thought we had had a tragedy in the family from the way I looked.

I am writing this with the *David Live* double album playing on the computer, having watched the BBC News channel devote itself to Bowie's death for the entire morning – and quite rightly too, as far as I am concerned.

I am so glad that I flicked through the LP rack in Redruth public library on one particular day in 1975, shortly after my marriage had broken up, and accidentally found *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. I had heard of Bowie, but had never paid him any attention as I had been into folk, jazz and classical music (with a dash of Beatles) for years. I decided to give the album a listen and was instantly blown away. During the years when 'my little French brother' Philippe lodged with me I bought *David Live* and found several other albums in the secondhand shop down the road, and the house was filled with Bowie's music whenever we were in (TV had not taken over me life in those days).

I am also glad that Pat bought two tickets for the *Reality* concert at the NEC on the 20 November 2003. David was magnificent live, with a terrific rapport with the audience, who were of all ages.

So – a very bad start to the week.

Happily, the ankle (which is what this diary is supposed to be about!) is behaving reasonably well. It is still swollen and red, and the small bones continues to deliver spasms of pain, but I am walking and driving without too much grief.

I remembered to change the beds at around 1pm, and did this with no difficulty.

Not strictly about the ankle but closely related are my bladder problems. Recently my pees have been low-output and a little stingy, but over the weekend I have been going a lot more during the day, producing a much healthier flow and peeing without discomfort. I don't know what has changed, or where my kidneys are finding all this water, but I am very pleased with the improvement – particularly as I have just managed to get through a pee-free night!

## **Tuesday 12 January 2016**

In contrast to Sunday night, last night was dire. I woke for a pee at about 2:45am and was still awake at 5:45am. I may have dozed off in between, but it didn't feel like it. Again, I may have dozed between then and getting up and 8:30am – or not.

So far this morning I have done my usual Tuesday job of carrying our heavy ironing board from its home in the utility room into the conservatory. Then I was tasked with getting out olive tree into the conservatory – a major task as it is in a very large pot and we have had a great deal of rain lately. I went hunting down at the bottom of the garden for something to stand the pot in but failed to find anything. The thing would just have to stand on the ceramic floor tiles. It probably won't need watering for a week or two, but when it does we will need to do so lightly. Protected by heavy-duty rigger's gloves, I *just* managed to lift it over the bottom of the door frame onto the floor.

I also brought the conservatory rug up from the summer-house, where it was stored for the Boxing Day party.

A much lighter task – though still involving standing for around 20 minutes – was stripping the meat off Sunday's chicken for a curry tonight and getting it simmering for stock.

By lunchtime the left foot was mildly painful, but I think it is recovering from the high-stress Christmas period, with its hours spent marchine around supermarkets and standing in the kitchen. The ankle and foot are still quite swollen and red, which is mildly worrying, but there is a hard-to-define feeling of increased strength in them. It is still a mere three weeks since the cast was taken off and I started walking without protection – it feels much longer – and nine weeks to my review appointment.

I have toyed with the idea of stopping the Naproxen tablets and trying an anti-inflammatory gel for a few days, to concentrate the medication on the ankle.

By dinner-time I was still very comfortable. There is what I can only describe as a 'firmer' feel about the foot. We'll be walking around Worksop tomorrow morning, so that will test it a little more.

## **Thursday 14 January 2016**

Yesterday we went to our local cinema's 'Silver Screening' (over-50s only) of *Joy*, which we thoroughly enjoyed. We struggled to get a space in either of the two car-parks and had a long walk to the entrance. The place was packed and we ended up almost at the back of the steeply-raked auditorium. I managed to walk up the steps in



the central aisle, with no handrail and limited access to the seat-backs, but the idea of going back down in the dark if my bladder didn't last the 2½ hours of the programme was daunting. I managed to 'hold my water' to the end and get to the Gents on the way out without disgrace, but it was a close-run thing!

We did a quick shop and Sainsbury's and went home to prepare afternoon tea for ourselves and in-laws Jackie and Bob.

Together, these two events made a really enjoyable day.

I slept solidly for most of the night, waking while it was still dark for a pee – and doggedly refusing to look at the clock. I stayed awake for what seemed quite a long time but was reassured when I heard the bin-lorry arrive, which is usually around 6:30am. I must have got off to sleep again eventually, and I had a weird experience when I woke again in daylight. I kept dropping off into brief fragments of dreams and then waking again, and even after I had done my toe and ankle exercises this continued. Some of the snippets were quite vivid, and at midday I can still remember one – a totally inconsequential glimpse of a huge square grill-pan leaning against the wall of a commercial kitchen!

I decided not to take Naproxen today so I could try the ilbuprofen gel I bought yesterday. By bedtime, having missed two 500mg tablets, I felt incredibly stiff and took a tablet. Another good idea down the drain.

This morning I bagged up the bottles left from Christmas in icy rain and sleet. These will go to the bottle bank after I have had my dental check-up at 2pm. This was a cold and damp but mercifully short job. Then I cleaned out the woodburner ready for what promises to be a cold evening and brought in some logs.

The rain turned to light snow after lunchtime.

With the exercise yesterday and the jobs this morning the left ankle has had plenty to do – and feels none the worse.

My attempts to recycle our bottles in our own village and in the one where I go to the dentist were abject failures. All the skips were full to overflowing. I will take them to the town tip tomorrow, hoping that their much larger skips will have room.

Bad news from the dentist: a loose back tooth, which I thought might last for a while, needs to come out before it becomes infected, which will involve modifications to my denture. So I will have an extraction next Tuesday and get the denture back on Friday.

By bedtime, having missed two 500mg Naproxen tablets, I felt incredibly stiff and took a tablet. Another good idea down the drain.

## **Friday 15 January 2016**

I had a fairly good night's sleep with, as far as I can recall, only one visit to the loo. Again, I deliberately avoided the clocks and, although I seemed to be awake for quite a while I was not distressed. The shoulders were not bothering me so I could take my choice of normally-comfortable positions. When I woke in daylight it was well after 8am, and even after doing my toe and ankle exercises I was content to stay and cat-nap until after 8:30am. My old routine of getting up quite early seems to have collapsed and I am getting very lazy. I really should get a grip – and I probably ought to start a gentle walking programme.

Our plan to go out and do various jobs – get Pat's chest x-rayed, collect an undelivered package from the post office, dump the bottles at the tip, collect some stuff Pat had ordered from M&S and shop for the weekend's food – was thwarted by a text message to say that a parcel that arrived while we were out or out of earshot of the doorbell yesterday would be delivered today. I looked at re-scheduling that, but

as the carrier didn't offer weekend deliveries we decided that Pat would go out and do her bits while I stayed within earshot of the doorbell.

After a coffee and watching the second part of David Attenborough's series about the Great Barrier Reef, I phoned Rowleys in Baslow to book a birthday lunch – one day early, on Sunday, because they are closed on Mondays.

When the post arrived I received a birthday gift from stepson Steve and family - £30 of vouchers for the Welbeck Farm Shop, which is one of the places we had planned to shop this morning. That should ensure some good eating on Monday!

There was also a letter from Santander's shareholder service. I inherited 100 shares when my Mum died around 11 years ago, and the modest dividends have always complicated my tax affairs. I had thought repeatedly about selling the shares, but this time the letter came with a form to make this easy, so I completed it. The estimated value is about £340, which will help us to put our savings account back together.

When Pat got back it was her turn to listen for the doorbell while I did a fast circuit: the Co-op at the top of the village for a few essentials, the tip to empty the three big shopping bags of bottles I loaded up yesterday, Sainsbury's to fill the car with diesel and the village post office to collect one of the two undelivered parcels. Shortly after I got home the other parcel arrived, and neither turned out to be particularly interesting – one, in fact was totally confusing!

When I got out of the car at the Co-op and started pushing a trolley towards the entrance, I suddenly became aware of how strong and comfortable my left foot was feeling. This was very welcome after feeling rather anxious about it – particularly the swelling and redness. I felt that, after six weeks of walking really comfortably in the cast, with the help of the Big Black FlipFlop, the past 3½ weeks walking without artificial support had been quite disappointing. The foot isn't completely painless – it aches quite a lot – but it now feels as if it is handling everything I throw at it fairly well.

## **Tuesday 19 January 2016**

A shameful lack of entries since last Friday. The fact is that nothing very noteworthy has happened to us over the weekend. Certainly nothing relating to the ankle, which – as I have to keep reminding myself – is what this diary is supposed to be about.

Mild pain in the left foot continues, coming and going unpredictably as aches or occasional sharper twinges, but it deals very well with whatever I ask it to do.

We went on a rather special shopping trip yesterday, to Welbeck Farm shop for some luxury meat and patisserie (thanks to Steve's and Sue's birthday vouchers) and a quick call at the local Co-op for some more mundane oddments. I remember remarking to Pat as we walked across the car park that it was nice to be just wheeling a trolley rather than having to lean on it.

Yesterday, it was four weeks since the cast came off. I have had quite a lot of itching around the scar on the inside of the ankle, with a little spotty rash, but regular doses of Savlon cream seem to have dealt with that. The foot still swells through the day and is red at bedtime, but both symptoms look a lot better after a night's rest.

## **Wednesday 20 January 2016**

I heard the bin lorry while it was still dark this morning, having apparently slept straight through, and catnapped until about 7:15am (a quick glimpse of the clock). I was feeling very comfortable, able to lie flat on my stomach with my legs both straight out with the toes hooked over the edge of the mattress and arms stretched out under the pillow and no hint of pain from the shoulders. I did the toe and ankle exercises, and then I must have gone back into a fairly deep sleep, snapping awake just before 8am.

I had been beating myself up about my laziness while awake, so I decided then and there to try a short walk. I had a cup of tea and did the neck and shoulder routine, being deliberately gentle because the shoulders felt quite good and I didn't want to strain them. Then I started the stopwatch on my new Casio watch and set off down our street, turning back at the main road. I was home in a fraction under ten minutes – a pretty paltry walk compared with what I was doing until mid-June, but a good start.

The left foot was not very comfortable during or after the walk, with a sharp pain on top of the instep. My original theory was that the joints that had been disabled by the cast had stiffened and the pain was caused by getting them moving, but the cast has now been off over four weeks, so I would expect simple stiffness to have sorted itself out by now. Maybe getting back into a regular routine of walking every morning and gradually increasing the distance will do the job. I certainly hope so!

An hour or so after the walk the pain had eased. By the time we got to town for the Silver Screening at our local Savoy and had to park just about as far away from the cinema as was possible, I was able to walk the two or three hundred uphill metres with no discomfort at all. After the programme I walked the same distance but downhill just as comfortably.

So, in spite of the pain straight after the 10-minute walk, the walk seems to have done no long-term harm and maybe some long-term good. A good plan will be to walk five mornings a week to a gradually-increasing time target rather than a distance target. 10 minutes for the remaining three workdays this week and maybe 15 next week, turning back at the halfway time.

### **Thursday 21 January 2016**

I had a mostly-good night, though early in the morning I was struggling with a mild but irritating pain in my left shoulder. I intended to get up in time for the 8 o'clock news but I must have dropped off and woke with a bit of a jolt at 8:10am. I felt really groggy when I got up but soon pulled myself together with the aid of a cup of tea and a gentle set of neck and shoulder exercises.

My second walk was against the clock. Having done my walk to the end of the street and back in ten minutes yesterday I decided to walk for five and then turn back. The stopwatch hit five minutes when I had gone about 20 metres further than yesterday, and showed 9 minutes 50 seconds when I got home, so gains over yesterday on both the out and in legs of the walk. The left foot was painful, but not seriously so.

Pat's back did one of its periodical seize-ups as she was coming down for breakfast, leaving her pretty well paralysed for the day.

I had a busy morning. The first priority was a batch of my home-made yogurt to be inoculated with the remains of the carton of Yeo Valley. I started this before breakfast. The second was a batch of my sourdough focaccia, picking up on the higher-oil recipe I used last time and hoping not to need extra flour so that I could make a softer dough. This worked well, and the dough was ready to shape and prove shortly after midday.

I just managed to get the three loaves baked before I had to go out to the dentist at 3:40pm. After a detour around the Co-op on the way home I soon had 24 portions cut, bagged and in the freezer.

### **Friday 22 January 2016**

This morning's walk was almost a carbon-copy of yesterday's, with the five-minute turnaround at more-or-less the same spot and reaching home with the watch showing 9 minutes 50 seconds. The left foot was less comfortable, with some pain under the heel and more along the outside edge of the sole.

Updated 13:56 24/1/20

This morning's challenge was to replace two blown halogen GU10 spotlight bulbs in two of our kitchen downlighters (plus, much more easily, an energy-saving candle bulb in our French, blacksmith-made, kitchen chandelier.

All went well until the backing board behind one of the downlighters pulled free of the ceiling. These are circular pieces of MDF which I cut and gave moulded edges on my home-made router table. They were stuck to the ceiling with a gunge called 'Hard as Nails' which, in this case, had lost its grip on the ceiling. 'Hard' was an understatement: I had to use a scraper and a hammer to get the stuff off the back of the MDF.

Like so many 'quick and simple jobs', this one was neither quick *not* simple, but I got it done eventually. Replacing the bulbs in the downlighters is particularly difficult as it involves pulling the housing out of the hole in the ceiling against the resistance of two fierce spring-levers which will take your fingers off given half a chance! Squeezing these together and getting them back through the hole is more difficult than getting them down.

Anyway, job done in the end.

Pat's back was not much better than it was yesterday, so I found her some TV programmes on the satellite box's hard drive and spent a large chunk of the afternoon researching smart TVs. Our old Panasonic is still working well after around ten years, but there are facilities which I would like to use which only a modern set can deliver. I think a 40-in Sony will do the job nicely.

As I write this, our regular Friday dinner of chicken wings and potato wedges is in the oven and about half an hour from ready...

### **Saturday 23 January 2016**

I woke up at around 7am this morning with just enough discomfort in one the shoulder to ensure that I wouldn't get back to sleep. I tried hard until just before 8am and gave up, doing the toe and ankle exercises before getting up.

I intend following my old routine of walking on weekday mornings, so today was officially a rest day – except that in my new hyperactive state I decided I would go and do the shopping I had planned for later in the day. I was out of the house by 8:35am and back before 10am with several well-filled and very heavy bags – plus a case of six bottles of my favourite red wine. Both feet had felt strong and pain-free throughout my visits to Aldi and Sainsbury's.

With nothing else on the agenda until dinner time, we both had a lazy day – in Pat's case against her wishes. Her back is taking quite a long time to settle down.

### **Monday 25 January 2016**

After a lazy day yesterday – apart from preparing and cooking a dinner of roast chicken, roast potatoes, Chantenay carrots cooked Vichy style and brained cabbage, followed by a coffee-free but alcohol-high version of Turamis. Pat was still pretty well immobile, though perhaps a little better than the previous day.

I got up at 7:40am this morning, which gave me time to make tea and do my ablutions before the 8 o'clock news and the neck, shoulder and back exercises while drinking my tea.

I walked for 7 minutes 30 seconds and turned round, getting home in 14 minutes 53 seconds. The left foot was painful when I started – mostly under the heel and along the outside of the sole, but this eased somewhat as the walk progresses.

So increasing the target walk from 10 to 15 minutes after three walks last week seems to work. If I can add five minutes each week I will be back to walking for 30

minutes a day in another three weeks and will be able to go back to my 'usual' route and start working on my time. By the time I see Mr Milner on the 14 March my walking record should be looking pretty good.

I ferried the very uncomfortable Pat – her back has not improved much yet – across to Anton's, basically to say 'hello' and take him shopping. All he needed was 40 cigarettes. If I added the cost of diesel burnt to that of his fags, I reckon it would add up to some very expensive smoking!

I had to go back to the dentist (again!) this afternoon, to collect my modified denture. This time they had got it right, so I was able to eat a delicious Ringtons' triple chocolate cookie with my afternoon cuppa for the first time in several days.

We were rather annoyed to discover that we had missed our usual Burns Night dinner, settling for cold roast chicken and leftover vegetables!

## **Tuesday 26 January 2016**

I had a restless night, thanks to my left shoulder, having to sit up and do some gentle exercises at one point. When I snapped awake to some pale early daylight I was angry to see that it was 7:40am. I resisted the temptation to come back to bed after my pee, except for a quick set of toe and ankle exercises.

Interestingly, the left foot had been quite painful, with sensitivity around the bottom of the tibia and on top of the instep when I got up for one or more pees, but when I got up for the last time this had all gone and the foot felt strong. The foot often hurts like this when I get up after sitting for long periods during the day

With tea made and the ablutions completed I was back in the kitchen just as the pips announced 8am. I did a full set of neck, shoulder and back exercises while drinking my tea and listening to the news. Then it was on with the £7 stopwatch for my walk.

The left foot was quite a bit less painful than it had been yesterday, with the bruised feeling in the heel and sole much less, although the soreness on top of the instep was still there. To my amazement I had covered around 30 metres more than yesterday when I turned round at 7 minutes 30 seconds, and on the way back I was feeling really good – almost like my old 'power walking', with long strides, a rapid pace rate and a good warm glow in the quads. I was doubtful about covering the longer distance home inside the 15 minutes, so I was delighted to stop the watch outside the front door at 14 minutes 37 seconds! I was comfortable, breathing a little more deeply than usual but with no strain at all. I had covered about 60 metres more than yesterday in 17 seconds less – brilliant!

Most of the morning was spent on my continuing quest for a smart TV. On Friday afternoon I had settled for a 40in Sony, but then I ran into problems. It seemed that the TV would have the BBC iPlayer but no corresponding tool for ITV or channels 4 or 5. Then I found *YouView*, which would extend the TV's programme guide backwards for a week, allowing the same access to programmes up to seven days old as to whatever is currently being broadcast. There was a rumour that Sony was pre-installing this software on their TVs, but it turned out that they were having contractual problems with ITV, and that even when those had been solved they were only going to install *YouView* on their posher models. Then I found out that there was a similar package – *FreeView Play* from – yes! - FreeView. By lunchtime today I had tracked down a Panasonic TV with this installed, done some market research and bought one from the Co-op for delivery tomorrow. It was rather more expensive than the Sony would have been (if there had been a Sony with everything I wanted), but I was quite glad to be 'back home' with Panasonic – my long-term favourite electronics manufacturer. And the set's specification was pretty mindblowing: I had been looking forward to moving up from our old Panasonic's HD Ready to the Sony's Full HD, but I hadn't been expecting 4K Ultra-HD! I had also looked forward to the

Sony's *Android* operating system, but the Panasonic's *FireFox* one (also developed for smartphones) looked like a good alternative.

So the telly now becomes an Internet and Web access device capable of doing all sorts of wonderful things.

Oh yes – the ankle! It has been none the worse for its challenging walk this morning.

### **Wednesday 27 January 2016**

Remembering the odd occasions when carriers have delivered parcels before 7:30am, I decided to get up really early for my walk to avoid missing the arrival of the new TV. I was tossing and turning before 5am thanks to a niggling left shoulder (and eager anticipation of the TV), but managed to doze until 6:30am, when I did the toe and ankle exercises and got up. I did my neck and shoulder routine over a cup of tea and set off in pitch darkness, a high wind and drizzle.

It was too dark for me to see the stopwatch when I got near my turning point, so I went a few metres further than yesterday and hit the doorstep at exactly the 15-minute mark, so I was probably a fraction slower than yesterday. The feet had been less painful, but the leg muscles didn't feel quite as good as yesterday.

I settled down for what might be a long wait for the TV to arrive, but at about 8:15am I received a text message telling me that my delivery window was between 10:44am and 11:44am.

Ironically, after writing nice things about Panasonic earlier, the mini-stereo I bought as a 'graded' item on Ebay around ten years ago, and which has performed immaculately ever since, chose this morning to stop receiving radio signals. I checked the aerial carefully, and as I was reconnecting it I got a few seconds of Nick Robinson on the *Today* programme. Obviously a bad contact somewhere rather than anything more complicated, but I was unable to repeat the effect.

The TV arrived about halfway through its 60-minute window, and the rest of the morning was consumed in installing it. So far we are both rather disappointed with the picture quality. The colours look washed out and things do not look anywhere near as sharp as on our ancient Panasonic. With full HD rather than HD ready, I expected HD channels to look better even if standard definition might have suffered a bit, but I can't say they did. I have played with contrast and colour settings, but so far have not produced anything even halfway impressive. So much for all the excitement.

### **Thursday 28 January 2016**

After a busy day sorting out the TV (how do they make sets less than two inches thick so *heavy*?) I had a really good night with no shoulder pains to disturb me. It was only in the last half-hour that I began to feel just a little uncomfortable, having been sorely tempted to claw back some of the sleep I lost yesterday. In the end I got up at 7:45am and had made tea and finished my ablutions in time for the 8 o'clock news – from *FreeView* on the kitchen TV as I had got no further with the radio yesterday. With neck, shoulder and back exercises done and a mug of tea drunk, I was out of the door at 8:15am exactly.

With an overdue family birthday card to post, I deviated from my new route, reverting to my long-established walk and aiming to turn round after seven and a half minutes. I was so distracted by renewing my acquaintance with the route that I forgot to check the watch and didn't turn until 7 minutes 55 seconds. That gave me a target time for the whole walk of 15 minutes 50 seconds, but I arrived home with the watch showing 15 minutes 32 seconds! The left foot was quite painful while walking, but that is hardly surprising after yesterday's antics.

I have been feeling a little tight-chested lately, and I noticed while lying in bed this morning that my breathing was deep, smooth and relaxed. It's hard to believe that the walking is responsible for this after only seven days when I am not breathing at all hard straight after the walks. My circulation seems good: it was a couple of degrees above freezing when I set out this morning but I didn't wear gloves and my hands were still warm when I got home.

There was an interesting debate on last night's *Trust me, I'm a Doctor*. One doctor was insisting that we need to exercise very hard – something like a professional athlete's regime – to extend our lives and another pushing thirty-minutes of brisk walking on five mornings a week as highly beneficial to anyone leading a normal life. I will be back to this in a couple of weeks, so I found that news really welcome!

I suffered a sad bereavement this morning: my Casio fx-6100 scientific calculator with built in clock, alarm, stopwatch and timer, which I had for Christmas sometime in the late 1970s, when it really was a miracle of technology, finally seems to have died. Luckily the fx-570c (no clock functions) which I bought for my Dad sometime later (he was a scientist) is still going strong and has been doing good service in the kitchen for jobs like scaling recipes up and down for many years. This has now been transferred to the desk in the study/bedroom. I might need to get a new one for the kitchen!

After my gloom over the digital radio reception (none) on the Panasonic mini-stereo, and having got the new TV settled in, I decided to have another look. The aerial – which is a piece of thin twin flex split at one end to form an open dipole antenna (I know about these things, having grown up with a father who was a radio ham before World War 2. The other end had a plug similar to the ones used for satellite TV signals, with a thin wire that has to find its way into a tiny hole in the socket before it is locked down with a hex nut. I disconnected the aerial and gave it a thorough health check with my multi-meter. I couldn't find a short or open circuit, so I took it back and reconnected it to the stereo. To my delight, DAB radio fired up quite normally. Something I did must have restored the circuit, so no black marks for Panasonic.

This afternoon we explored the various TV catch-up apps on the telly, which between them offer a huge number of programmes, some which have not even been broadcast, and watched the first episode of *Deutschland 83* – another subtitle-fest, this time from Germany via Channel 4, which I had not recorded. It looks quite good. Unfortunately I couldn't whizz through the commercial breaks at 4x speed as I do when playing recorded programmes from the satellite box's hard drive.

We watched the second episode before picking up on some of our chosen live broadcasts. I think the arrival of smart TV is going to give us quite a lot more flexibility in our viewing.

## **Friday 29 January 2016**

I got up at 7:45am and with the ablutions done, the exercises completed and a cup of tea under my belt I set out for my last 15-minute walk at 8:15am. I decided to repeat yesterday's route (apart from the slight diversion to the post box) as this will be the start of my longer walks. The left foot was feeling rather bruised and battered but I was able to keep up a brisk pace and turned a little bit further down the road than I did yesterday. In the teeth of a westerly head wind that must have been well into the gale range (the forecast for this morning is for winds over 50mph) I made it home in 15 minutes 10 seconds.

Pat was quite a lot more mobile today – though still struggling – as we were able to get to a pub in Sheffield to celebrate Anton's 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday with his care worker, Andy, Pat's sister Jackie and brother-in-law Bob and a very old friend of Anton's and his

wife. It was a really enjoyable occasion – and meant that we didn't need a dinner in the evening.

### **Monday 1 February 2016**

The weekend was a lazy one, dominated by highlights of the Australian Open tennis finals. Apart from the 6-minute walk to and from the shops for milk and the Sunday paper, cooking Saturday and Sunday dinners, and lighting and tending the woodburner (a panic reaction to a 90-minute power cut on Saturday morning), I did very little.

This morning's walk was the first with a 20-minute target. 10 minutes took me to the start of the lane where I have been walking for years, and almost within sight of the field gate which was my turning point for a long time. It didn't look unreachable in 15 minutes, so it will be interesting to see how far I can get in two weeks' time.

The walk back involves a short but fairly steep climb, and I was walking straight into a stiff wind. When I got onto our street the 20-minute target looked unreachable, but when I stopped the watch at the doorstep it read exactly 20 minutes.

The bottom of the left foot felt quite good throughout the walk, but the top of the instep started to hurt only a couple of minutes into the walk and was fairly painful all the way, though I didn't feel that this was slowing me down. It was certainly worth putting up with it to get such a good result!

Pat was planning to go to see Anton as usual, but with me chauffeuring. Feeling as bad as she did, she finally decided to see the doctor. I tried to get her an appointment online but there was nothing for a week and a half, so she rang the surgery and was told the doctor would phone her later. Nothing had happened when it was time to go, so I went alone and took Anton to the Co-op for his cigarettes.

As soon as I got back I started a batch of home-made yogurt, and the rest of the day was lazed away, most of it in finishing an excellent Val McDermid thriller with a complicated ending.

The doctor didn't phone until mid-afternoon, and when Pat had explained what was happening she made an appointment for 5:30pm. I drove her up to the surgery – only a three-minute walk when you are fit but impossible for Pat at the moment. I went to the shop and bought milk but still had a half-hour wait in the car. In spite of Pat's concern that this didn't seem like her 'usual' acute attacks of back pain, the doctor was convinced that it was nothing more sinister than very severe muscle spasms and prescribed diazepam as a muscle relaxant.

### **Tuesday 2 February 2016**

I made it to exactly the same point in ten minutes as yesterday with somewhat less pain in the left foot, but fighting a cold gale it took me eight seconds longer to get home – disappointing in terms of performance but just a tiny bit more exercise! The foot had definitely been less painful all the way round. I was breathing quite hard when I got back, and after a few minutes indoors I was quite hot and sweaty, so this had obviously been a good work-out.

By mid-morning the left foot was almost pain-free.

I decanted the yogurt a good 24 hours after inoculating it and it was very thick.

Under Pat's expert supervision I got a load going in the new washing machine, and then set her up to try just a little ironing – hopefully not too bad for her body and good for her head!

My various dodgy bones all felt quite comfortable for the remainder of the day.



### Wednesday 3 February 2016

I had a disappointing walk this morning, after making steady progress. After the first five minutes my left foot (not the ankle) was getting quite painful, and when I turned round at the 10-minute mark I was about 30 metres short of where I had turned on the last two days. Fortunately, the pain eased quite a lot on the return leg, and to my surprise I completed the walk in 20 minutes 23 seconds, making up in time what I had lost in distance.

It is now six weeks since the cast was taken off. I expected some stiffness after the foot had been unable to move for three months, and some pain while I got all the little joints in the foot mobile again, but surely it should have eased by now.

After half an hour, the pain had eased considerably, but I am wondering which way to go with this: keep up the exercise or give the foot a few days' rest. Given that I am walking normally, without a limp, but with some quite severe pain, I am leaning towards keeping the foot working. I think I will reassess this after the last two walks this week.

I whisked the yogurt before breakfast. It was very thick and creamy. Did I put one more tablespoon (3) of skimmed milk powder in than usual. I don't know without checking my notes.

The foot didn't settle down completely before I went shopping around midday. It was just a drive up the road and a quick lap of the Co-op, but it was still quite painful.

Pat got through quite a lot of ironing today. I hope she hasn't overdone it.

### Thursday 4 February 2016

This morning's walk began with a disappointing out leg. The foot was a little less painful than yesterday, but if anything I had got a few metres less far at 10 minutes than yesterday. I made a real effort coming back, especially on the uphill stretch, and got round in 19 minutes 50 seconds.

Pat, who has not had much appetite lately, expressed a fancy for shepherd's pie a few days ago. I picked up plenty of mince yesterday and this morning's task will be to make a really tasty filling for what will, in fact, be a *cottage* pie (beef, not lamb). As we got distracted by a visit from friend Sue we decided to have just jacket potatoes with the mince mix tonight – lazy!

After wrestling with the Web on the new smart-ass TV today I decided that I needed a remote control with a full keyboard because once you go into keyboard-entry mode in the TV's browser you lose control of the pointer, making a search more-or-less impossible. So for under a tenner I ordered a wireless controller from Amazon. It should be here tomorrow under the month's free trial of Amazon's *Prime* service, which I started today. We watched the first three episodes of *Bosch*, Amazon's original series about my favourite fictional LA cop – really good, and very close to the book from which the series is adapted. What swung it for Amazon against Netflix was *Bosch* and *Game of Thrones*, plus the fact that the *Prime* subscription costs about the same as Netflix but has additional benefits such as free delivery of all eligible Amazon purchases (which presumably means those supplied direct by Amazon) and some Kindle e-book freebies, too.

### Friday 5 February 2016

The ankle felt good this morning and I set out at a good pace for my final walk of the week. The pain did develop as the walk progressed, but nowhere near as badly as most other mornings this week.

To my delight, I got about 20 metres further in 10 minutes than I did at the beginning of the week – almost to the field entrance where the horses graze. I was still feeling

good when I got within sight of home, but in spite of pushing hard the stopwatch showed 20 minutes 11 seconds at the front door. A very positive result to round the week off after weakness in the past three days.

When I got back, I decided to check whether I could use my Samsung phone as a remote, and quickly found a free app from Panasonic which proved to do the job – quite impressively. Well, fairly. The remote arrived at coffee time and once I had it talking to the TV I could use the browser far more effectively.

Later in the morning I took the vacuum cleaner round the whole downstairs (having cleared the decks in the kitchen, including putting the heavy hardwood chairs up on the table) and then manhandled it upstairs. Our Sebo cleaner weighs a lot more than its appearance suggests and our spiral staircase is, putting it politely, a bit of a pain. I managed to carry the cleaner with my right hand, but I had to lift up on every step with the left (fused) foot as the right knee struggles on the stairs. I cleaned the whole of our bedroom and the *en suite*, struggling against the Sebo's powerful suction on the rich pile carpet, and then manhandling the beast back down again, also on the left foot. This was a little painful at the time but I am happy to report a rapid recovery. I was in what used to be called 'a muck sweat' by the time I finished, and very glad to sit down with some strong coffee. Pat had steam-mopped the kitchen floor and wiped down the furniture, so we were feeling fairly pleased with ourselves.

### **Monday 8 February 2016**

We had a fairly uneventful weekend, with Pat feeling rather unwell and me with nothing special to do apart from cooking a cottage pie for Saturday and a roast chicken (Simon Hopkinson's recipe with lots of butter) for Sunday.

I had a reasonable night, up a few times as usual to pee but getting back to sleep quite quickly until the last hour, when the usual shoulder pain kept me wriggling around to find a position that wasn't too uncomfortable.

I got up at 7:40am and was out for my walk just before 8:15am, having done all the usual stuff including neck, shoulder and back exercises. I am now able to do all the exercises standing, which is progress – no loss of balance on the side bends.

I set out in bright and breezy weather with the left foot feeling fairly comfortable after its two rest days. The walk was disrupted slightly by the need to post a birthday card, and much more seriously by a huge puddle across the lane which stopped my well short of this week's 12 minute 30 second mark. I had to walk back a short distance, then back to the puddle and turn again. I was probably defeated by the mental arithmetic because I had half a minute in hand when I got back to our front gate. I had to walk on a short way and turn round, eventually reaching to doorstep with the watch showing 24:54. The last few minutes were in cold, wind-driven rain, and by the time I had got my jacket off the rain was pelting down and rattling on the windows – a lucky escape.

So my first 25-minute walk was a little disorganised but I used almost the full time without difficulty, apart from the usual protest from the left foot. If the puddle hasn't gone when I reach the end of the lane tomorrow I will have to stay on the road, which won't be a problem.

With Pat still feeling unwell, I did my second solo run to see Anton. The rest of the day was fairly lazy (which is why I am writing this paragraph on Tuesday), much of it occupied with watching several episodes of *Bosch* back-to-back with me eating cold chicken and Pat eating warm shredded wheat for dinner. After that we watched the final couple of episodes of season one.

## **Tuesday 9 February 2016**

The left foot felt quite good this morning and it was almost painless when I set out for my walk. At the five-minute mark it was still feeling good, and was better than I can remember from any other walks right to the end.

The huge puddle in the lane, seen from a distance, had what might have been a narrow path above water through its middle, but I decided to stay on the road up to the 12 minute 30 second turning point. My legs felt a little weary but the feet were good. However, it took me 20 seconds longer on the return leg, which includes two short but sharp ascents.

Oddly, after a relatively pain-free start to the day, I had a really sharp blast of pain in the front of the left ankle when I got up from my chair having finished the post-breakfast cuppa. This faded after a few steps, but it was pretty intense while it lasted. Later on, even after visiting the Co-op and vacuuming downstairs, I was impressed with how comfortable the foot was feeling. It really is quite erratic. I hope it settles down before I see Mr Milner in five weeks.

This afternoon I did some digging in the Kindle's documents folder, the Amazon cloud and the PC, discovering that I had all but two of the 21 Bosch books published so far. As I have some Christmas and birthday voucher credit on my Amazon account I was able to buy the missing books without guilt and arrange the whole set in chronological order on 'the magic reading machine'. As soon as I have finished the book I am currently reading I intend to embark on a mammoth Bosch-fest. With luck the next book will be out by the time I catch up.

## **Wednesday 10 February 2016**

I got up a little earlier than usual this morning, forgetting the toe and ankle exercises in my haste. After the usual routine I left for the walk – the third on the 25-minute schedule – straight after the 8 o'clock news. I can't believe that next week will be on the 30-minute target, with only the distance to increase.

It was a bright and – for once – fairly still morning with the temperature at around 5°C. Interestingly, the feet felt quite comfortable, even after the first five minutes of the walk, so maybe the exercises are doing more harm than good. I will stop them for a while.

The huge puddle across the lane had drained away, leaving just a damp and slightly muddy patch, so I decided to go that way. I turned about ten metres past the second large bush after the puddle and arrived at the doorstep at precisely 25 minutes.

My legs feel tired during and after the walks, with a bit of tenderness around the right knee in particular. The other day I said to Pat that, when I have the right ankle fused, the six weeks rest might give the right knee – which had an awful lot to do while the left ankle was not weight-bearing – time to heal. I have to say, though, that while the left foot is coping with life quite well I think it needs to get quite a lot better before I would like it to have to be 'the good leg'. And, in spite of the horrible state of the right ankle revealed by the x-rays, it is coping really well.

Looking back at my spreadsheet, I see that I stopped my regular walks altogether after the 19 June last year, having had three quite bad weeks due to the left ankle being too painful. I'm very pleased to be back on the programme after a break of about eight months.

## **Thursday 11 February 2016**

Yesterday evening and during the night the left foot was really painful whenever I got up from the chair or out of bed (which was several times!), but by the time I got

downstairs this morning it was working quite normally and comfortably. I can't imagine what's going on here – I will have to see what Mr Milner makes of it.

It was a frosty but sunny and fairly wind-free morning, ideal for my walk. For some reason I checked my watch as I passed the bus stop near the end of our street: four minutes exactly. I was striding along quite well, and to my amazement I turned about thirty metres past the big bush mentioned yesterday. I checked the watch as I passed the bus stop again: it gave me 4½ minutes to get home, and I arrived with 24 minutes 51 seconds showing. An encouraging result. I hope to improve tomorrow, the last day before I increase the time to the target 30 minutes.

The foot was mildly painful for a while after getting home, but probably better than after the other walks.

### **Friday 12 February 2016**

This morning was another fairly still, bright and near-freezing one, making my walk really enjoyable.

After a reasonably painless walk yesterday the left foot was quite painful all day, particularly when getting up after prolonged sitting. This continued every time I got up for a pee through the night, but as I reached the floor downstairs this morning I was suddenly walking comfortably. This is all very odd.

I hit the 12½-minute target quite a bit further along the lane than on previous days, so I counted my paces after turning back to the marker bush – total exactly 100, so the distance would be around 50 metres. Quite good progress through the week.

I got back to the bus stop with exactly four minutes in hand and stopped the watch at the door at 25 minutes 1 second. The left foot had been protesting for the last five minutes or so, but not enough to cause real distress.

So that was my target for the week achieved: five 25-minute walks with a steadily increasing distance – 125 minutes of brisk walking. Next week: Mosley's Magic 150 Minutes...

### **Monday 15 February 2016**

On Saturday we had a welcome visit from Alistair, Julie, Ewan and Tom. In the morning, however, we went shopping, mostly for St Valentine's Day bits. We decided that Pat's dozen red roses should go on display a day early rather than be hidden in the garage. We had a lovely afternoon, with some excellent own-brand pizzas from our local Co-op – the best shop-bought pizzas I have ever bought, I think, with a really authentic crust.

In the afternoon Alistair and I scoured the Amazon video app for something to amuse the boys, but in the end they asked to watch my extended edition DVD of the third *Hobbit* movie, which we all thoroughly enjoyed. Then we went to a pub for dinner and couldn't get a table, so we ended up buying a bit of just-about-everything from the local chippie, which seemed to suit everyone.

Our Valentin'e Day was quiet but enjoyable, with Aldi's amazinglt-good luxury croissants for breakfast. Lunch was delicious little dressed crabs with blinis, followed by some pretty authentic *macarons*, all from M&S for lunch, with a bottle of Prosecco which I managed to finish bny tea-time. Then it was back to the other M&S goodies we had bought: *Coquilles St-Jacques* followed by crispy aromatic duck. Pat had a raspberry *panna cotta* and I had a slice of lemon tart.

Through the afternoon and evening we watched all six episodes of the BBC's classic *Pride and Prejudice* on the Drama channel. There was a modest shower of snow which didn't melt, leaving me feeling a bit unsure about today's walk.

This morning I was awake from around 6am, just cat-napping, and got up at 7:35am. The snow was still with us, but I decided to try my first 30-minute walk anyway. For the first time this winter I put gloves on. The pavements had a sprinkling of frozen snow, quite slippery in places, so I changed my route to use main roads all the way. Our asphalt pavements are quite rough and frost-bitten, so I didn't have any trouble, reaching the goods entrance of the Co-op in exactly 15 minutes and home again with the watch reading 30 minutes 35 seconds.

The left ankle had been playing up right through the weekend and was fairly painful during the walk, but soon eased when I got home. After driving across to Anton's in Sheffield later and home it was feeling quite normal and had been really strong on the clutch pedal. This is strange...

## **Tuesday 16 February 2016**

This morning's walk really did feel more like a 'power walk', with - subjectively, at least - a longer pace length and a faster pace rate than I have managed since I restarted my walking programme. It was a very cold but bright and beautiful morning, with no trace of Sunday's snow and very little frost or ice on the ground. I reached the bus stop marker in under four seconds and decided to go back to my lane route. With 15 minutes on the watch I turned round about ten metres short of the field gate which was my marker for three months from March to June 2015.

Coming back, I felt as if I was flagging slightly, but to my delight - and amazement! - the stopwatch showed 30 minutes 8 seconds when I reached the front door. The return journey had been harder than the out leg but I had managed a comparable time. I could certainly feel the effects of the exertion when I got inside - breathing quite hard, slight dizziness and breaking out in a sweat as I took my fleece and sweatshirt off.

I checked the spreadsheet on which I recorded my walking stats from November 2014 to June 2015. I had added a field for times to the field gate in March 2015 and recorded the times until I stopped walking in June. The fastest time I found was 16 minutes 12 seconds. I estimate that I would have got there in about 15 minutes 10 seconds this morning, which is hugely encouraging. I will give a little extra push tomorrow and try to make the gate within 15 minutes.

From the spreadsheet it looks as if I turned round at the field gate on all the walks I did in that period, and at a glance I can't see any total times which are not well over double the field gate times. Of course, as my target now is to keep up the 30-minute time, I won't be turning at the field gate but - I hope - considerably further down the lane.

My power-walking gait had involved my heels hitting the ground quite hard, but the feet were fairly comfortable for most of the walk, just beginning to hurt in the last five minutes or so - which was when I tried to speed up to get home inside my 30-minute target.

At 10:30am, having spent half an hour or so on my feet in the kitchen, the left foot was only very mildly painful, which was rather good considering how hard I worked it on today's walk. By 12:30pm, having had a mix of sitting down and doing more standing-up jobs in the kitchen, the foot was virtually pain-free, with just a faint hint of tenderness when the heel hit the floor. I really feel that all the damage done to the foot since the cast came off is healing at last. The message seems to be to keep the foot working.

### **Wednesday 17 February 2016**

This morning was cool and windy, with light rain still falling after a very wet night. I decided to risk my amazing DuoFold fleece (probably entering its third decade with me!) over a sweatshirt, and it turned out to be more than adequate.

Fifteen minutes out, I turned just a couple of metres short of the field gate, and was convinced that I hadn't done as well as yesterday. I failed by a few seconds to get home on the thirty-minute mark and believed that this too was worse than yesterday. I was therefore delighted, when checking back with yesterday's report, that I had actually got about eight metres *further* at the fifteen-minute mark and back home just 13 seconds later. The walk had felt harder and more painful, but the result was very satisfying.

Feeling a little guilty that I hadn't stopped to chat with one of the regular dog-walkers, I checked the £7 chronograph this morning. If I stop it with the button at 2 o'clock and then restart it, it starts again from the stopping time. If I use the 4 o'clock button it carries on timing and jumps forward when I restart it. So if I stop and start with the 2 o'clock button it will record my actual walking time. I don't think stopping for a short chat will compromise my exercise too much.

### **Thursday 18 February 2016**

I felt very stiff all day yesterday. We went over to Sheffield to take superstar grandson Barney, who was home from university on a 'reading week', out for lunch. When we got to his house I needed the loo, and had a terrible job getting up and down the stairs, which have only one handrail. Was the stiffness due to that morning's strenuous walk, or perhaps the weather, which was very wet and chilly all day?

The weather was much more pleasant for my this morning's walk, with no wind, a fairly clear sky and the temperature at just above freezing. However, the rain must have continued well into the small hours because there were wet patches and puddles everywhere. There was also quite a lot of ice, and I had a number of quite frightening slips but fortunately no falls.

Both feet were quite painful from the outset, but I decided to try the lane because the big puddle didn't look too bad from a distance, forcing me to take to a narrow and very soggy grass verge for about 20 metres to get past it in each direction. Disappointingly, at fifteen minutes, I was so far short of the field gate that I couldn't even see it round the bend in the lane. I turned round and didn't get home until the watch read 30 minutes 38 seconds.

So a disappointing walk after the first three this week, but I was hot and sweaty when I got into the house and had had the required thirty minutes of brisk walking.

Later on we went to Aldi to pick up a couple of items from the Thursday special purchases and ended up filling a small trolley.

Then we drove round to our friends John and Sue to deliver John's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday present. Their daughters Victoria and Catherine were visiting, along with Catherine's two beautiful children, Annabelle and Joseph, and John had lit a bonfire in the woods behind their house. We were invited to inspect it, and I needed a hand to get across the muddy ditch behind their fence. I got back by myself by grabbing a long, bendy sapling and abseiling down!

### **Friday 19 February 2016**

This morning's walk was very similar to yesterdays, except that the big puddle had shrunk, but unfortunately had not dried up completely. It presented an icy obstacle, which I managed to handle, and I turned round at more-or-less the same spot as yesterday, arriving home at precisely the 30-minute mark.

So that is my first 150-minute week completed!

## **Monday 22 February 2016**

In spite of last week being the most demanding yet in terms of walking, I managed to walk round Retford Market and Farmers' Market with mobility and energy to spare on Saturday morning. My legs and feet felt really comfortable. The rest of the weekend was quite lazy physically apart from routine food preparation and cooking.

I had been noticeably more comfortable walking around the house, and noticed one very encouraging sign: my right knee suddenly seemed to be performing much better than usual when going up and down stairs, needing less support from my hands on banisters. Maybe the walking is strengthening the knee after its difficult service as 'the good leg' while the right was recovering from surgery.

My shoulders are still quite a problem, keeping me away for a long time during the night.

This morning was clear, dry and mild and, with legs feeling well rested, I set out at a good, brisk pace. I was within a couple of metres of the field gate when the watch showed 15 minutes – exactly the same as last Wednesday – and, with a bit of a hard push at the end, it showed exactly 30 minutes when I reached the front door. Once inside, I was really hot and sweaty, and breathing quite hard.

This morning we decided to take our old Panasonic 32in LCD TV over to Anton. After examining various strategies, we managed to share the load with Pat at the front and me, because the set actually fits under my arm, bringing up the rear. I get my grip towards the middle so that I was taking more than half the weight, but Pat still did amazingly well. There wasn't much room for our feet, which neither of us could see, but we managed to get the monster onto a soft pad in the boot of the car. We put a bag trolley in for possible use at Anton's end, but in the end we carried the set in as before. His ancient cathode-ray-tube set took a lot of shifting, but Anton amazed me by managing to take one side when we lifted it off the stand. We did use the trolley for that, so that we could fit it precisely into a space under the stairs.

I set the Panasonic up while Pat took Anton to the Co-op. It took an age to tune itself, probably because the aerial signal was very poor. The picture quality was acceptable, though.

We shopped at our local Co-op on the way home and then crashed to recover!

## **Tuesday 23 February 2016**

Pat had suggested that using two pillows might be affecting my shoulders, so last night I tried sleeping with just my goose-down one. To my amazement I had a really good night's sleep without a hint of the usual shoulder pain, and – once awake – I was able to lie on my front and enjoy the feeling. However, I did have quite severe pain around my right shoulder-blade – something I suffered from a lot a few years ago, for which I had visited both a chiropractor and a physiotherapist who taught me most of the exercises I still use now. I am sure this was due to manhandling heavy TVs yesterday and that it will soon clear up.

I noticed when I did my exercises this morning there was much less discomfort and 'creaking and crackling' from my neck.

Unsurprisingly my walk wasn't up to yesterday's standard. I think I got further than I did last Thursday, though, and reached home with the watch showing a few seconds past 30 minutes.

Later on I went up to the neighbouring village for a haircut and to get the car cleaned by the local valeting service.

## **Wednesday 24 February 2016**

Quite a comfortable night with my one pillow, and once I was half awake (from 5:45am onwards) I felt really good. I've always envied the way dogs can just fall over and relax totally with their legs stretched out, and that is how I felt this morning.

For some reason I was a bit breathless getting dressed this morning. Bending to put on my socks and lace my shoes seemed to be a bit of a fight with my belly!

However, today's was my best walk yet. It was a beautifully clear, sunny morning but very cold – about -2°C on our outside thermometer. The air was dry, though, and although there was a coating of white frost on our outbuilding roofs and everything growing the pavements and the lane were completely clear. The low sun in my eyes was a bit of a problem on the out leg, but very cheering. My legs felt good, so I set a long stride and fast pace-rate, and finally reached the field gate before turning round at the 15-minute mark. On the way back my legs felt quite tired, so I was really amazed, as well as delighted, that I made it home only 17 seconds past the 30-minute mark.

I decided it was time to get the huge number of empty jars and bottles we have accumulated over many years sorted out. We used to make – and consume – a lot of jams, jellies and marmalade, but haven't done much for a few years, so we decided to keep all the nice Bonne Maman jars and get rid of everything else.

It took me the whole morning to deal with this. First, the two large plastic boxes of more recently-emptied jars which were cluttering up the garage. Then the much older ones that were filling two old shelf units in the shed at the bottom of the garden. I had to take the lid off each jar, and decided to put the jars and lids separately in a large shopping bag. The lids would drop to the bottom and could be emptied into the wheelie-bin when the jars had been dumped. I filled seven large bags, which I took to the bottle bank at our village's 'Civic Centre' (formerly and more appropriately called the village hall) in two batches to avoid having to empty the car boot. The amount of bending and twisting involved in this was amazing, and by the time I had finished I felt as if I had had a really good work-out.

The Bonne Maman jars – 40 or so of them – were left neatly on one of the shelf units.

## **Thursday 25 February 2016**

I had no recollection of getting up to pee during the night when I woke up, and my water glass – usually almost empty by morning – was almost full. I had my usual hour or so of lazing, and again I felt really comfortable. The second pillow may or may not have been the actual cause of my shoulder pain, but it had certainly aggravated it.

The left foot was very sore when I got up, the pain concentrated on the inside of the ankle at the bottom of the tibia, where the biggest surgical scar is. I was seriously wondering if I would be able to do my walk, but by the time I got to the kitchen the pain was fading.

I have remarked before on this strange phenomenon, which isn't happening as much now as it used to, in which the ankle hurts when I get up from a long period in bed or sitting and stops hurting after a few steps.

Anyway, by the time I had made tea, done my ablutions, emptied the dishwasher, done my exercises and drunk my tea the foot felt fine, and I set out at a decent pace. My legs and feet soon began to feel weary and a little sore but I tried hard to keep my stride-length and pace-rate up, and to my delight and amazement I reached the field gate, turning perhaps a metre further on than I had yesterday. Going back, the discomfort increased, and I reached the bus-stop with only 3½ minutes in hand, but with a big effort I arrived at the front door with 31 minutes 21 seconds on the stopwatch – just four seconds more than yesterday.



The challenge now will be to match this performance tomorrow...

In the afternoon, I gave Pat a hand when she decided to tidy the garden after this weird winter with its warm weather and Atlantic storms. Tomorrow I will have a very large but not terribly heavy builder's bag of rubbish to take to the tip.

### **Friday 26 February 2016**

Having done so well with the walking this week, I wanted to go out on a high, but the left foot was quite swollen and painful during the early morning. As usual, though, it eased once I had got downstairs and into my normal routine. It was still aching when I set out on the walk, and I didn't feel that I was keeping up the same pace as on the last two days. As I got onto the lane I was convinced that I wouldn't get to the field gate inside the 15-minute target, so I pushed as hard as I could but was amazed when I was between ten and twenty metres *past* it when the watch hit 15 minutes – the furthest I have got so far by quite a margin! I paid the price on the way back, though. When I got back onto our street it was clear that I wasn't going to get home inside the 30-minute limit. The watch stopped at 30 minutes 50 seconds – 29 seconds longer than yesterday.

A struggle, but a considerable achievement for me. I have done more each day than the previous day right through the week, and completed two weeks of 30-minute walks, meeting the target of 150 minutes a week recommended by Michael Mosley.

I am rather concerned about the left foot, though. It is still red and swollen, and is very painful at times. I wonder whether I should have contacted the hospital, but I have my appointment in just over two weeks, so I might as well stick it out.

The 'not very heavy' builder's bag was actually heavy enough to give me trouble lifting it onto the railing beside the green waste skip at the tip, but I managed at the second attempt. By the time I had got home, put the bag, the tarpaulin used to protect the boot and my gardening gloves away, and taken out and shaken the boot carpet (not wanting the spoil the valeters' work from Tuesday), I was ready for coffee and a shower.

Preparing for the shower I noticed that the left foot was less swollen than usual and was also a better colour match with the right one, looking much less inflamed.

### **Monday 29 February 2016**

Not quite such a good walk this morning – a morning with the temperature at zero and a very hazy sun sparing my eyes from dazzle. The left foot and legs felt weary in spite of a lazy weekend, and I stopped between five and ten metres short of the field gate at the 15-minute mark. Discouraged, I did my best to up the pace on the way back but didn't feel I had done very well as I approached home. I was therefore agreeably surprised to see the stopwatch reading 30 minutes 38 seconds – 12 seconds less than on Friday – at the front door.

I should focus on the main aim, which is to do thirty minutes of brisk walking each day. I am doing the time, but based on the distance the briskness is rather variable!

Later, we went across to see how our old TV is serving Anton. He seems well pleased with it and turned down Pat's offer of a simplified remote control for the visually impaired.

When we got back there was a card on the doormat telling us that an order had been left with our next-door neighbours. I went to collect it and got some serious unexpected exercises as I only just managed to get the heavy parcel back home. It was a little chest of drawers which turned out to be much smaller than expected. It won't suit the space for which it was intended, so we are trying to work out where else we can use it. Pat was very disappointed.

## Tuesday 1 March 2016

'Meteorological spring' arrived with a wet and windy night and morning. The temperature was close to 10°C but with the damp and wind-chill it felt a lot colder.

I don't know whether it was the weather or not, but the inside of the left ankle was very sore when I got up, and the discomfort didn't wear off as quickly as it usually does. I managed to start the walk and it did ease, but at the 15-minute mark I was about 50 metres short of the field gate. Even with the shorter distance the time at the front door was 30 minutes 33 seconds.

This morning we started Michael Mosley's 8-week blood sugar diet, so instead of Pat's Oatibix and my usual muesli, prunes and yogurt we each had an avocado and a poached egg for breakfast. Not a good start, because we should only have had half an avocado each! The first diet lunch was also disrupted because our friend Sue turned up and asked Pat if she wanted to go to the shopping outlet near Doncaster, an invitation which she eagerly accepted.

I had two cups of black coffee during the morning – strange how it tastes less of coffee without milk!

I decided to simplify lunch and just have 60 grams of cheddar and a big heap of mixed salad with a sprinkle of home-made vinaigrette dressing.

I had a low-milk cup of tea at about 4pm.

For dinner Pat cooked a really nice vegetable curry with 'cauliflower rice', which turned out to be a lot more pleasant than we expected – no stale brassica taste or smell at all. Dessert was a quarter of a rather under-ripe – and therefore not very sweet – melon.

With both meals I had just a glass of water.

I decided to allow myself just half a glass of semi-skimmed at bedtime.

Neither of us had felt at all hungry through the day.

## Wednesday 2 March 2016

I slept really well, in spite of a few trips to the loo, and had a really enjoyable hour or so half awake before getting up. By which time the left shoulder was protesting a bit.

When I got up, the feet and ankles felt a lot better than they had yesterday.

Last night's BBC forecast had promised sleet or snow, but this morning was bright and sunny with the temperature at just under 5°C and not much wind as I set out (it turned out to be moderately strong and quite cold when I was walking back). I reached the field gate – just! - in 15 minutes and home in 30 minutes 10 seconds. A better result than yesterday's and without much pain in the legs and feet.

As part of the Mosley plan, I weighed myself before my almost-milk-free cup of tea: 14 stone 13¼ pounds. When I put the new battery in the scales last week I scored about 15 stone 3 pounds, but I may have had one or two meals before that test.

We had no problems with the food at all. For breakfast we each had 150 grams of Yeo Valley full-fat plain yogurt (I have decided to stop trying to compete!), Pat with half a dozen raspberries and I with six prunes, which I have discovered to my surprise and delight are well down in the low-GI group of fruits (I will have to stop putting muscovado sugar in with them when cooking, though). We drank water instead of our usual fruit juices. Lunch was the low-carb ploughman's lunch and dinner was a bass fillet each baked in foil with vegetables and plenty of aromatics, followed by the rest of last night's melon.

Black coffee is rather unrewarding, but I am enjoying my tea with a little less milk.

## Thursday 3 March 2016

I am convinced that I'm sleeping better already, and my hour-or-so of wakefulness was totally comfortable, with no pain from the ankle or either shoulder. I even dropped off and had half an hour or so more sleep before waking properly at 7am and wallowing in the comfort for 35 more minutes. The feet and legs felt good when I got up.

After my ablutions, and wearing exactly what I wear every morning, I weighed in at 14 stone 10¾ pounds – 2½ pounds lighter than yesterday. Mosley says a lot of what you lose early in the diet is water, but weight is weight! I put out a tape measure and I started logging my waist measurement – and wished I hadn't when I found that my 'real' measurement (round the navel) was a horrifying 45 inches..

My legs did feel a little weak and weary when I set out, and I had to push hard to reach almost exactly the same point as yesterday in 15 minutes. The watch was reading 30 minutes 21 seconds when I stopped it at home.

It will be my turn to cook tonight – something with subergines and minced lamb. Meanwhile we worked together to produce breakfast for two – a four-egg omelette with 100 grams of frozen peas and two big handfuls of spinach. 90 minutes later I felt as if I will never want to eat again! Amazingly, Pat managed all her share apart from a tablespoonful of peas and spinach, which I kindly ate for her. We decided a light version of the ploughman's would be more than enough for lunch.

The left foot has been very well behaved today – not much swelling and very little pain.

## Friday 4 March 2016

The sky looked quite good when I looked out of the en-suite window but by the time I had got downstairs it was a lot greyer. By the time I was ready to go out, with the temperature at 2°C, it was drizzling with odd snowflakes – definitely a cagoule job.

I weighed myself at 14 stone 10¼ pounds, only half a pound lighter than yesterday's amazing result, and measured my waist at 46 inches – one more than yesterday. My belly did feel harder than yesterday – perhaps the effect of the first red meat since we started the diet. Chicken tonight, but not Friday's usual wings and wedges!

The lane was flooded so I stayed on the road, turning at the entrance to the trout fishery, and got home in 30 minutes 17 seconds feeling chilly and damp.

Pat has now started her own programme of 30-minute-ish walks, but her bones and muscles are struggling.

I bought a load of low-GI ingredients (on Amazon Prime so no delivery charges!) so we can have lo-carb brownies and other treats.

## Saturday 5 March 2016

We had an enjoyable lie-in this morning, with a cup of tea in bed for a change. Pat had weighed herself while downstairs and was thrilled with the result – she had been convinced that she wasn't losing weight and by yesterday evening she was getting very negative and grumpy.

I had had an hour or so of cat-napping with very little disturbance from the shoulders, and when I got up I could see that my left foot was hardly swollen at all and was almost the same colour as the right one. It had been pretty swollen at bedtime but the recovery was encouraging. It's only nine days until I see M r Milner again, so I hope to give him good news.

After ablutions it was weights-and-measures time: 14 stone 9 pounds (1¾ pounds lighter than yesterday) and 46 inches again. It's a pity I didn't think to weigh myself on

the morning of the first day, but that opportunity is lost now. Anyway, the weight-loss so far recorded is 4¼ pounds.

### **Sunday 6 March 2016**

*After* a cup of tea in bed and a rather constipated visit to the loo, I weighed in at 14 stone 7¼ pounds – six pounds less than on Tuesday, just five days ago! My belly felt softer but my waist was still stubbornly at 46 inches.

By 1pm, when we had brunch, I think I must have had a serious blood-sugar dip: I was feeling head-achey and a little dizzy, but this soon passed with the help of two eggs scrambled with crème fraiche and 4oz of smoked salmon.

We went to Sainsbury's for some more diet supplies and then had a lazy afternoon watching a classic drama on TV. Dinner was an 8oz sirloin steak each with masses of salad and two large and gorgeous Spanish strawberries.

### **Monday 7 March 2016**

This morning was beautiful – not a cloud in the sky, temperature just around zero, sun shining and a chilly but not very strong wind. I woke up with no significant pain in either shoulders or ankles, and the left ankle didn't really start to protest mildly until I had walked for 20 minutes.

After yesterday's startling result, I was a bit upset to find that I actually weighed half a pound *more* this morning.

I managed to maintain fairly long strides and a reasonably rapid pace-rate on the walk, and turned at 15 minutes about 30 paces – say 15 metres – past the field gate. With a bit of pushing I got back with the watch showing 30 minutes and 9 seconds – a good time with an extra 30 metres.

Today's breakfast was 150 grams of Yeo Valley full-fat plain yogurt with a dessertspoonful of unsweetened stewed Bramley apples.

We went to Anton's to meet with his social worker and discuss all sorts of complicated issues around his care. Anton ended up very angry.

Lunch was the low-carb ploughman's again and my treat for after lunch was changing our beds and vacuuming the bedroom – a pretty sweaty job as our bedroom was surprisingly warm.

Then I had to buy a DVD player for Anton as his ancient one wouldn't work, even when I had used a cleaning disc on it. I found a well-reviewed Sony machine on Amazon for an amazing £25. It will be here tomorrow thanks to Prime but we're not scheduled to visit again for two weeks.

Finally, I arranged for someone to come and give us a price for cleaning and sealing our block-paved forecourt. He will be here tomorrow morning.

### **Tuesday 8 March 2016**

Wow! After yesterday's excellent walk I went way better this morning – still carrying 14 stone 7 pounds (my lightest yet but only by a quarter of a pound) and a 45-inch waist – I passed the field gate with the watch just past 14 minutes and counted 105 paces before I hit 15 minutes and turned. So that is about 100 metres further for the whole walk than turning at the gate. I had felt right from the start that I was really powering along and I obviously was! I managed to sustain it – and actually surpass it – on the way back, reaching home with the watch reading 29 minutes 34 seconds. Not quite the recommended 30 minutes but a hell of a lot more exercise than I have got on any other walk.

The legs and feet were feeling fine after the pounding they had taken, and continued to feel quite comfortable for the rest of the day.

I have tried two phone apps that claimed to count your steps, and found them hopelessly inaccurate. I got a pedometer out that I have had for years in a desk drawer and ordered a battery to fit it on Ebay. Then I realised that it wasn't the posh Silva instrument Pat bought me when I started walking to beat diabetes about 12 years ago. And *then* I looked in another desk drawer and found that. Amazingly, the only tiny button battery cell I had in my battery box was the right one and the pedometer worked perfectly. It will display steps counted which is what I need for the blood-sugar programme, or distance or calories if programmed to do so.

Today's weight gives me a loss for the first week of 6¼ pounds – ¾ of a pound short of half a stone. The big loss at the beginning must have been me shedding a lot of water. The fat must take longer to shift.

Anton's DVD player arrived late in the morning. I got the kitchen TV down off the fridge and connected it up. It worked perfectly. It is a absurdly tiny Sony unit, black all over and weighing almost nothing, so he may not be able to find it in the shadowy slot under the TV. I might take a dollop of Blu-Tak and fix the feet to the shelf.

Then I got a guy round to quote for cleaning, re-sanding, and maybe sealing the block paving in out forecourt and side path. We booked him to do the cleaning and re-sanding (£300) next Wednesday and agreed to consider the sealing (£200) next year.

We had the lo-carb ploughman's lunch again today – very satisfying – and are having the 'French seafood stew' using a jar of little sea-creatures from Aldi's Italian range tonight.

### **Wednesday 9 March 2016**

It rained heavily during the night and continued, a little more gently, through the morning. I had had a good night and decided to get up a little earlier than usual and take Pat a cup of tea because she definitely *hadn't* had a good one. Then, after the usual ablutions, exercises and cup of tea I weighed and measured myself – 14 stone 7¾ pounds (actually 12 ounces *heavier* than yesterday's low) and 45 inches. A bit fed up, I zipped myself into my Gore-Tex cagoule and set out.

I was rather peeved to discover that there were no gloves in the cagoule's pockets, because it was quite breezy, the temperature was around 5°C and the rain was coming down – to put it politely – steadily. My hands were feeling the wet wind chill, but as I got into my rhythm they stopped bothering me.

When I got to the end of the lane I couldn't see through my rain-drenched specs how bad the big puddle was. I toyed with the idea of staying on the road, but I really wanted to do a walk directly comparable with yesterday's and Monday's. When I got to the big puddle I couldn't see a dry – or even shallow – path through it, so I just ploughed on, paying no attention to the cold water sloshing into my old Reeboks. It turned out that there were several other lesser puddles, but these were relatively trivial.

In spite of the conditions I was moving really well, and I was 85 paces past the field gate when the stopwatch hit 15 minutes – just 20 short of yesterday's 105-pace turning point. Today I decided to count paces back to the gate to confirm my total. I reached the front door with a time of 30 minutes 14 seconds, so my walk was a little shorter in distance than yesterday and a little longer in time. Considering the conditions, I was pretty proud of that.

I hung my cagoule over the bath taps and went straight upstairs for a long, hot shower and some dry clothes. When I shed my joggers they weighed about five

pounds, and the bottom half of my boxers and my socks were saturated. I put the trainers under the en-suite radiator and threw the clothes down the stairs before stepping into our wonderful shower.

Our diet breakfast was half an avocado and a poached egg each, with a large glass of water.

Then the nightmare began.

Our BT HomeHub (about to become redundant with the switch to PlusNet) was showing an orange internet light – it should be blue. This happens quite often when the settings jiggle the mains adaptor, but this time I couldn't correct it. I tried all the other techie tricks but the light remained stubbornly orange. So I decided to contact PlusNet to find out if BT had cut me off prematurely – my PlusNet router hasn't arrived yet! It took half an hour to speak to an advisor, who couldn't check our phone line because it hasn't been transferred yet but suggested I contact BT. Luckily I found the phone number on a letter expressing regret that we were leaving, and was dealt with almost at once, although the advisor seemed to be trying to convince me that changing to PlusNet was a bad idea. She eventually grasped that I just wanted the Internet back. I entered our landline number and was told immediately by a recorded message that there is a major problem in our area, which they hope their engineers will be able to fix within – wait for it! - 24 hours. If I entered my mobile number they would text me to let me know when all is well, but after two attempts and being told that my number was not a valid mobile number, I opted for a recorded message on the landline. Job done – I hope!

We don't realise how shockingly dependent we have become on the Internet until we can't get online. Every little problem that has arisen this morning has prompted the same response from me: 'I'll look on/do it on the web!' Followed by 'Oh bugger – no web.'

I was concerned that the outage might interfere with my switch to PlusNet. The Plus One router – exclusive to us fibre-optic users – arrived in the post this morning, but would the Internet connection be available for the changeover?

When I had finished my after-lunch (miso soup with vegetables – pleasant but far from exciting) cup of tea, I walked back to the kitchen with my empty cup and noticed a *blue* Internet light on the router. A quick check on my phone confirmed that we were back online. No message from BT, though. It's absurd how relieved I felt.

I was now able to get on Amazon and Ebay to look for a new case for my mobile phone. One of the plastic grips that hold the phone in mine had snapped off. I found and ordered a useful looking case.

Later on I couldn't find a single supper recipe in the diet book that lit my candle. We decided to use the salad made at the weekend with a tiny of mackerel fillets in olive oil and a hard-boiled egg each. This will be fine for the carb limit but not sure about the calories.

### **Thursday 10 March 2016**

I got up early this morning because today is Internet changeover day. The left ankle was feeling a little stiff and had a slight ache.

I weighed in at 14 stone  $7\frac{3}{4}$  pounds – exactly the same as yesterday – and still measured my waist at 45 inches, so no progress.

It was a milder morning at around five degrees with a fine drizzle. I didn't feel that I was walking quite as well as yesterday, and this was confirmed when I 'only' got 45 paces past the field gate. I got home with the watch showing 30 minutes 11 seconds.

I had an email to say the PlusNet Internet connection was ready, and I managed to get everything connected before we sat down for breakfast (yogurt and fruit). I was supposed to wait five minutes before trying the connection so this suited me fine, but when I got to the PC there was still no connection. I checked everything but realised that there seemed to be no light on the router to indicate that it was powered up, let alone connected to the net. To make matters worse, the pictures in the booklet didn't match our router!

I am writing this during what was supposed to be a 15-minute wait for an advisor. That was fifteen minutes ago.

I got a reply in about 18 minutes. The advisor, also called Paul, was very helpful until, in the course of moving the router around so I could read various number off it, I touched the red button on the phone and terminated the call! Rather than start another call, I carried on checking stuff and discovered that there was no power on the router because I hadn't assembled the AC adaptor properly, and me an old hand at the electrics! I corrected this but still didn't connect to the Internet.

Paul rang back fairly soon and asked me to check the cables. To my disgust I discovered that, instead of plugging the DSL cable from the router into the phone socket I had plugged in the one from the BT OpenReach DSL modem. I would have sworn that I'd packed this away with the other BT stuff, but obviously not. Old hand goofs again! I must be getting too old for all this stuff – as well as for all the stress.

It took some checking and fiddling at the PlusNet end but Paul eventually got the Internet connection working. Phew! I had already connected the Ethernet cable from the PC into the hub and was now able to connect our two smartphones, our two Kindles and the new smart TV to the Wi-Fi network. There was a brief panic when the router stopped again, but I think this was just PlusNet putting the final touches to the connection.

Happily, everything seems to be working now. Very much so, in fact: I just ran 'Britain's Number One Broadband Speed Checker' and got a download speed of 81.82Mb/s and an upload speed of 19.99 Mb/s. I don't think I ever got speeds as high as those on BT Infinity.

We had a slightly modified no-carb ploughman's for lunch, both feeling pretty shattered. Then carried on with clearing the front bedroom and making the broadband installation as tidy as possible.

To my surprise, with the router tucked away under our cast-iron spiral staircase (which I have always blamed for the poor wi-fi around the house) we seemed to have better wi-fi coverage than with the BT Hub on top of the sideboard. Maybe the technology has moved on and the new router puts out a more powerful signal and can handle a weaker incoming one.

The front bedroom job involved, among other things, bagging up quilts and pillows and dragging them up the aforementioned staircase to be put in the loft. Other stuff was fed into the wheelie bin until there would be barely enough space for the weekend's kitchen refuse and the rest bagged up for next week's bin. Then there was some swapping around of bedside tables (me) and the big double bed to be made (us, because the mattress is very deep and very heavy, making putting on the fitted sheet a real wrestle).

Finally, with Pat putting the finishing touches to what was now and transformed guest bedroom, I vacuumed the whole downstairs and then cooked an unusually complex diet dinner of sea-bass and finely sliced vegetables steamed in foil. Then – total collapse.

Chasing round the problems with the router and then moving it to its new, more discreet home, had involved a great deal of bending, twisting and crawling. That, plus all the other work left me feeling very stiff and sore.

### **Friday 11 March 2016**

Pat had to get up early today for a girls' shopping trip to Belper, of all places, as she suggested – and provided – a cup of tea in bed. That complicated weighing and measuring time.

I was pleased to weigh in a pound lighter than yesterday at 14 stone 6¾ pounds. I weighed my tea mug empty and then full of water at 9½ ounces, so my net weight was 14 stone 6 pounds and 2½ ounces. I suppose I have to round this up to 4 ounces rather than down to zero, so the final result is 14 stone 6¾ pounds. The waist was still stubbornly stuck at 45 inches. That is the lowest since we started the diet, seven pounds less than my starting weight. Re-phrased, it is half a stone in eleven days.

The walk was pretty grim. My back and legs were stiff and my feet were aching. I got to the field gate in well past 16 minutes and home in a miserable 2 minutes 7 seconds longer than yesterday. The last quarter of the walk was really hard – slow and painful all the way. So the rest of today is going to be *very* lazy.

Yogurt and prunes for breakfast, and as soon as Pat was on her way I started watching *Django Unchained* – pretty good but not a patch on Tarantino's finest, *Pulp Fiction*.

Lunch was the 2-egg omelette with peas and spinach, and then I watched *Domino*, a half-true story about Laurence Harvey's daughter who became a bounty hunter in Los Angeles and died tragically young of a drug problem – good to see the love Keira Knightley doing the violent stuff.

### **Saturday 12 March 2016**

I had a 50-minute lie-in this morning and after the ablutions weighed myself at 14stone 5¼ pounds – a pound lighter than yesterday and a total loss so far of 8 pounds – imagine sixteen 250-gram packs of lard stacked up! Not bad. The waist measurement remains stubbornly at 45 inches, though.

Apart from a visit to Jackie and Bob and calls at Aldi and Sainsbury's, this was a fairly uneventful day.

We defrosted the remains of the vegetable curry and cauliflower rice for dinner. What we had coked was for three portions, and we didn't manage to finish it in two sittings.

### **Sunday 13 March 2016**

I had rather an explosive visit to the loo this morning – maybe too much vegetable curry!

Just a quarter of a pound off yesterday's weight at 14 stone 5 pounds. I didn't measure my waist because Pat had moved the tape, but that was no bad thing as progress has been minimal. How I can lose eight pounds without any change to the belly I just do not know!

We had an easy drive to and from Buxton in lovely weather, and an enjoyable day with Alistair and family. Although Ewan was unwell the boys played beautifully in the garden. Tom is a 'real person' now, and great fun to be with.

Dinner was eight-ounce ribeye steaks with green salad. I allowed myself to eat Pat's leftover piece – probably a couple of ounces.



## Monday 14 March 2016

The left ankle was quite painful when I got up, but it eased before and during the walk – very odd. I tried the new scale this morning and found that it doesn't weight the same as the old one. I weighed 14 stone 4½ pounds on the old one but 14.66 (why go decimal?) on the new. I recorded the old one and will work out something on the spreadsheet to convert decimal to imperial and vice-versa. If we are going to use the new scale I really need to convert the last two-weeks' weights to decimal and add the difference between the two scales.

The key point is that in 13 days – almost a quarter of the eight-week diet plan) I have lost nine pounds, which means I may lose 36 pounds in the full eight weeks. That is 2 stone 8 pounds, which would take me to a weight of about 12½ stone. And there is still tomorrow's gain or loss to add to the calculation for the first two weeks.

The legs felt a little uncomfortable and unco-ordinated when I started walking – not surprising after driving 100 miles yesterday – and I was quite surprised to get 25 paces past the field gate in 15 minutes. They loosened up on the way home and I finished the walk in 30 minutes 7 seconds.

We decided to have a brunch rather than breakfast and lunch, because we had to get to the Royal Derby for my ankle review by 2:15pm. So, at about 10:30am we had the big mushrooms covered in half a tin each of baked beans with cheddar cheese stirred in – a really filling meal. It turned out that the widening of the M1 to four lanes in our area had finally been finished and I could actually drive at up to 70mph, so we got to the hospital with over an hour in hand. Quite a bit of that was used getting through the stupid car-park machines, which refused to give us a ticket for ages. However, we had time to pick up some diet soft drinks from M&S (yes – there is one at the hospital's main entrance along with a Costa's, and yes – these drinks are permitted on our diet). I had Florida orange and Pat had cloudy lemonade. Mine was the nicer, and the pleasure of drinking a fairly sweet and fruity drink with virtually zero carbs and sugar and very few calories is hard to describe.

I was called early and given an x-ray form, was called very quickly in x-ray and quickly again in the clinic – actually before my 2:15pm appointment! I didn't see Mr Milner or Claire (we had passed her close enough to exchange greetings earlier), but the junior doctor we saw did go and consult 'the big boss' because the joints still haven't fully fused and one of the screws is out of place. That means yet another trip to Derby in three months, much to Pat's disgust as she is trying to plan a much-needed holiday.

Missing the rush hour we escaped from Derby reasonably quickly and got home very soon – before 4pm, I think.

Tonight's dinner was fish and vegetables steamed in foil bags with lime-juice and soy. The fish, something called 'basa' was disgusting: hard and dry but mushy, totally without texture or taste, which mashed down into a thick clag as we chewed. Neither of us ate more than half our fillet. Thankyou, Sainsbury's.

## Tuesday 15 March 2016

I am sitting at the desk slightly out of breath and sweating with my glasses steaming up, after a really excellent walk.

I weighed in (on the old scales) at 14 stone 4 pounds, a quarter of a pound lighter than yesterday, taking my weight loss for the first two weeks of the diet to 9¼ pounds. I still couldn't find the tape measure, so no waist measurement again.

I had to park the car on the road before setting out for my walk, as we are having our block paving cleaned professionally today. Then I set out at a really good, yet

comfortable, pace. My strides were quite long, and I got 75 steps past the field gate in 15 minutes. Even better, I finished the walk in 29 minutes 53 seconds.

I then had to move the wheelie-bins – very heavy after last week's clear-out! - and bring the little conifer that lives outside the front door, in a large pot full of heavy, wet compost, round to the back. Luckily I bought a bag trolley a while back, but it was still quite awkward as I had to lean the trolley back a long way to keep the tree on it. Then a cup of stale tea and this diary session.

Pat was out visiting Anton while most of this was going on.

The job was finished at midday, so I then had to return the conifer to its home, put the green bin out for collection a

The legs and feet felt better rather than worse after my strenuous walk this morning.

Later in the afternoon I weighed myself on both the old scale and the new one and worked out the factor needed to convert from old to new. Then I worked on my 'weight and waist' spreadsheet, playing with formulae until I could weigh on the new scale and convert the reading down to match the old one. I kept the old readings and set up the conversion from tomorrow.

### **Wednesday 16 March 2016**

I woke for a pee at around 5am this morning and drifted without ever falling fully asleep again. At 7:15am Pat asked if I would like a cup of tea but I opted to get up at 7:30am and take one to her.

For some reason – a hangover from yesterday's strenuous walk, perhaps – the right ankle was quite painful when I got up. The pain was in the usual place on the inside of the ankle around the bottom of the tibia (which is, of course, fused to the talus below). It didn't go away after a few steps as it usually does, but by the time I had done the ablutions and exercises it felt fairly good for walking.

I had a bit of a disaster with the French market digital watch, the one that cost 10 euros last time we were in France. I must have caught one of its four buttons putting my gloves on as I started walking, because when I checked at what was normally the 7-minute mark it was showing an alien reading. I worked out that it was probably European Central Time with Daylight Saving Time, plus or minus an accumulated error from whenever it was we went to France. I played with the buttons, which must have slowed me down a bit, then decided to walk to the field gate and back without timing. I couldn't resist fiddling again, though, and the second time I got a sensible time display. I made the field gate in exactly 15 minutes and arrived home with a time of 30 minutes 3 seconds – a bit of a let-down after yesterday but just on target, and with no significant pain.

In the afternoon I decided to get the petrol mower out and try to start it, as the grass was very long and messy and it was a lovely sunny afternoon. To my surprise, three presses on the primer and two pulls on the cord did the job – impressive after the winter lay-off. To my further surprise, I managed to mow the 'lawn' quite painlessly.

Then a shower and a visit to the eye clinic at the hospital, complete with dilating drops and the search light in the eyes. Nothing to be done about my immature cataracts or the wretched floaters, but come back in a year.

### **Thursday 17 March 2016**

Just before 7am Pat decided she wanted an early cup of tea again this morning, so I decided to join her. I decided to get up as soon as I had finished mine and was out for my walk at 7:50am. With a clear sky and the temperature just on freezing, it was a lovely day for it.

First, though, the weighing. Even adjusting for the discrepancy between the old and new scales the reading on the new was crazy: 14 stone 7.63 pounds. I checked with the old scale and got 7 stone 4 pounds, which would be an improvement of 0.17 of a pound. I think I may stick to the old scale for consistency to the end of the diet.

The legs were a little tired and the left foot a little sore, but I got 30 paces past the field gate and surprised myself, getting home in 30 minutes 7 seconds. The morning's second cup of tea went down *really* well.

When I warmed our coffee in the microwave there was a strong smell of kippers. Foolishly I had just put one in on a plate – uncovered. So after coffee – mercifully without a taint of kipper – I gave the machine a good wipe out with Dettol.

Pat cooked the Spanish chickpea and spinach soup from Mosley's book for lunch. Quite nice but all the better for a few twists of the pepper mill. Very filling, too – so much so that she suggested we might settle for the no-carb ploughman's for dinner.

Following yesterday's encounter with the mower, this morning (after a trip to Sainsbury's and Asda for yet more diet ingredients – it seems that the less we eat the more we spend!) I loaded the 16-litre rucksack sprayer with strong Roundup and gave every visible weed along our front wall and down the garage side of the garden, which is mostly gravel, a good shower. The ones we had in the block paving of the driveway were totally obliterated by the monster pressure-washer the guys used.

We did eat the ploughman's for dinner, and not until about 7:30pm.

My feet were aching, with various familiar twinges, and my legs were tired by bedtime.

### **Friday 18 March 2016**

The left ankle was still rather painful (the usual place around the bottom of the tibia) when I got up, but it calmed down when I did my exercises.

Really good news on the weight, which was confused yesterday thanks to my problems with the new scale. On the old scale I weighed 14 stone 2¾ pounds, 1¼ pounds less than the day before yesterday and bringing me down below 200 pounds, probably for the first time in several years. The total weight loss since the 2 March went into double figures at 10½ pounds.

The ankles coped well on the walk but my legs were tired from the week's exertions and I was about ten or fifteen metres short of the field gate at turning time. Pushing hard, I managed to get home just 20 seconds short of the 30-minute mark.

In the afternoon I decided to clear the garage up – something that looked like a mammoth task as I hadn't really tackled it seriously since the first operation in September 2014. I was agreeably surprised at how quickly I broke the back of the job, leaving just some dusting and sorting of overcrowded shelves which I will probably tackle on Monday.

### **Saturday 19 March 2016**

I woke up at a little before 7am this morning, after a decent night's sleep, and really enjoyed the fact that this was a rest day – no walk. Towards 8am Pat suggested a cup of tea and we sat and read for a while before first I and then she had a shower.

I weighed myself and decided I didn't need to deduct anything for the cup of tea because I had had quite a long pee before coming downstairs. To my delight, my weight was 14 stone 1½ pounds, a pound and a quarter lighter than yesterday's, giving me a total weight loss since the 2 March of 11¾ pounds. I am within easy reach of getting below 14 stone, which is amazing. Tomorrow...?

We had yogurt and fruit for breakfast and then went to our butchers in Tickhill to get two quiches for Anton and two sirloin steaks for tomorrow's dinner. The high spot of the rest of the day was watching the Australian Grand Prix qualification, now on Channel 4, although I had already heard on the BBC news that Lewis Hamilton was on pole.

While writing this, I had a look at my old walking record, when I was using the *MyTracks* app to log each walk and latterly also recording my time to the field gate, which was mostly over 17 minutes. This also shows the distance walked, which wobbles around 2.3 to 2.4 kilometres. So I have now done five full weeks of half-hours 2.5km walks: 62.5km in 750 minutes.

### **Sunday 20 March 2016**

We had a decent Sunday lie-in this morning, with tea again provided by Pat – in spite of the fact that, with my weight down to 14 stone 1½ pounds yesterday there was a chance of cracking the 14 stone barrier today. When I finally got downstairs at well after 9am and did my ablutions I was foolishly disappointed to find my weight at 14 stone 0½ pounds. I could have deducted the half-pound for the tea, but having decided not to yesterday that would have been a bit dishonest. Anyway, my total weight-loss since the 2 March – less than three weeks – is 12¾ pounds, and I have two more weights to record before hitting the three-week mark, and five more weeks to go.

### **Monday 21 March 2016**

I thought I would have to abort this morning's walk, because my left ankle was very painful when I put weight on it. I remembered having some pain on the nocturnal trips to the loo, too. The site of the pain was the usual one – the inside of the ankle around the bottom of the tibia. Getting up and down on the loo and bidet was really nasty, but a few minutes later I was able to do my neck, shoulder and back exercises standing up, and by the time I had listened to the 8 o'clock news headlines I felt able to try the walk.

First, though, the weight. After recent scores I thought I was in with a chance of getting below 14 stone by the end of week three, but today's weight was 14 stone and a quarter of a pound, which is a loss of 13 pounds (almost a stone). Very close to cracking the 14-stone barrier, and still one morning weigh-in to go.

Once I got into my stride the ankle was feeling fairly normal and I was walking at a reasonable pace. However, I decided not to push too hard, and got to about 5 yards short of the field gate in 15 minutes and home in 29 minutes 55 seconds.

After entering my weight on the spreadsheet and juggling with the bar-chart scales for a few minutes, and then writing the above, I was able to get up off the chair and walk without pain. It is clear that staying still with no load on the ankle brings the pain on, and movement – even fairly strenuous walking – relieves it. The cause cannot be structural – movement of the supposedly fused bones, for example – and seems to be stiffening of *something* which eases with movement.

We spent the afternoon getting Anton to the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in the middle of Sheffield. For once the NHS had provided a sign interpreter – a charming young woman who really made Anton's day. The bad news is that he has refused the option of more eye surgery and the consultant confirmed that this was probably the best decision. They will keep an eye on him, but there seems to be nothing they can do to stop the increasing sight-loss. Despite all this he was very pleased with his new DVD player, which I installed before we left for the hospital, but Pat is finding the situation really difficult to cope with.

## Tuesday 22 March 2016

I was very relieved to get up this morning with almost no pain in either ankle – very pleasant after yesterday's scare.

This turned out to be a momentous day for me. With the scale at 13 stone 13¼ pounds, I have got below 14 stone barrier and lost exactly a stone in the first three weeks of the eight-week diet. If this rate of loss could be sustained (which it may well not be!) I would have lost just over 37 pounds, or two stone nine pounds, finishing – if my calculations are correct, about 12¼ stone.

By contrast, the walk was pretty rubbish this morning, with the turn again around five metres short of the field gate. However, despite very weary legs and achy feet, I did manage to keep up the pace and finish the walk in 30 minutes 2 seconds.

Later on we did a shop at Aldi and Sainsbury's to prepared for a lunchtime visit from Pat's lovely niece Bex and her even lovelier little girl, Anya, tomorrow and one of Good Friday from Alistair, Julie and The Boys.

The stress of yesterday was really telling on Pat so she indulged in some cooking therapy. I finally got round to stopping the water running down the outside of our shower hose and the ball-valve in the en-suite loo dripping. Finally, the block-paving work had left a lot of sand on the grille in a drain at the side of the house. I didn't want to risk it all falling into the trap – or into the underground pipe if there wasn't a trap, so I got the trusty George vacuum cleaner out of the garage and sucked it all up.

Both my feet are feeling a bit overworked, and there is an unfamiliar pain in the right ankle, where the deformity is now quite dramatic. I need to watch this, and maybe wear the new splint for a while. Maybe it will succeed in pulling the ankle back into shape.

At some point in the day I realised that I had forgotten various things when making the list for this morning's shopping, and had been unable to find totally carb- and sugar-free soft drinks in either Aldi or Sainsbury's. I did a quick run up the the village Co-op and bought guacamole, houmous and canned chickpeas for tonight's dinner and tomorrow's lunch. Then I found a good selection of fruit-flavoured and artificially sweetened sparkling spring waters at 55p per litre bottle. Even better, they were on a 3-for-a-pound offer, so I grabbed three.

## Wednesday 23 March 2016

This morning the scale read 13 stone 13½ pounds, a quarter of a pound more than yesterday. I decided that this was quite probably within the old scale's margin of error – or my body's! - but I was still disappointed.

I decided to wear the splint given to me by the OT's just before last Christmas, which I have never really used, to give my right ankle a little help. It felt odd at first and not really comfortable, but the ankle felt secure for the walk.

The walk itself produced a strange result. About halfway out I felt that I was definitely not walking as fast as I needed to make the field gate in 15 minutes, so I decided to rewrite the rules: from today on I would keep walking to the field gate even if I didn't get there in 15 minutes. I got there in 15 minutes 25 seconds. On the return leg I felt that I was pushing harder and this was confirmed when I got home in a total of 29 minutes 54 seconds, breathing quite hard.

The morning was devoted to preparing for Bex and Anya's visit. I vacuumed the downstairs thoroughly while Pat finished cooking a big pan of the chickpea-and-chorizon soup from the diet book, then went down to the summer-house to find some toys for Anya.. We had a lovely time with our guests, including lunch. They both had some of the soup, but I had to watch them tucking into camembert, salami and ham

with half a baguette crisped in the oven— just the things I normally eat for lunch. It wasn't as hard as I expected.

They left at around 2pm and I put the toys away at the bottom of the garden, still wearing my new splint, which was feeling more comfortable now. I decided to keep it on for the rest of the day, but eventually took it off when we sat down after dinner.

### **Thursday 24 March 2016**

A disappointing morning on the weight front – 14 stone and a quarter of a pound, a pound heavier than my best weight scored two days ago – but a real cracker of a walk, getting 95 paces past the field gate in 15 minutes (and therefore walking almost 100 metres beyond the target distance) and still getting home with the watch showing three seconds less than 30 minutes. There was very little discomfort in either foot on or after the walk, after being a little more careful to line the new splint up accurately, and I had had no pain on my night-time visits to the loo or when I got up.

After breakfast we went into town to get food for a visit from Alistair, Julie, Ewan and Tom tomorrow. This involved visits to Wilko (a long walk the length of their huge shop), B&M (quite a hike round another big shop trying to find what we were looking for), Boots (several hundred yards up the hill and several laps of the store before we each found what we were looking for) and finally back to M&S (but not before I had taken the stuff we had bought so far back to the car – another three or four hundred yards – and several laps of *that* shop because we couldn't find what we wanted before hiking back to the car.

This afternoon was vegetable prep and me cooking a large vegetable curry, the recipe from the Mosley book quite liberally-interpreted.

I felt pretty good after all that, suffering no real protests from legs or feet.

### **Friday 25 March 2016**

While I was still half asleep, very relaxed and comfortable, Pat brought cups of tea up. I didn't bother to sit up, but just took a few sips while lying on my front. I seemed to have had a lot of visits to the loo during the early hours, but had fallen asleep quickly after each one. Now, though, my bowels were beginning to demand attention, and shortly after 7am I had to slip into my trainers, grab a dressing gown and hurry downstairs. After a period of rather scanty poos, this one was explosive – probably the result of two bowls of Spanish chickpea and chorizo soup at lunchtime and vegetable curry with cauliflower rice for dinner.

I decided not to go back to bed, or to have another cup of tea before my walk. I got dressed quickly and weighed myself before doing my exercises – an trivial but irritating rise from yesterday's 14 stone and a quarter of a pound to 14 stone and three quarters. That is a small increase on each of the three consecutive days since my record of 13 stone and a quarter of a pound.

After yesterday's record walk followed by a big hike around the shops, my legs felt a bit weary this morning, and this was reflected by the fact that I only got fifteen paces past the field gate in fifteen minutes – but I did get past, and I managed to get home again just nine seconds after the 30-minute mark, so not a bad result.

The rest of the morning was spent preparing Easter lunch for Alistair's crew – and getting some patio chairs out and washing them, because it was actually warm enough to sit out by midday.

We had a lovely, if boisterous, day with the boys. We ate some of what we gave them but not all. I treated myself to two small lamb chops, but not crabs, of course. I did eat a frankfurter, though, and a little cheddar.

## **Sunday 27 March 2016**

Yesterday's weight was a little better, dropping from 14 stone and three quarters of a pound to 14 stone exactly in spite of Friday's indulgence.

Aidan and Ellie decided to come up and see us, with Bailey the crackpot dog, and we had a rather quieter lunch with them. Again, I strayed from the strict diet, though not a lot.

In spite of this, I had dropped another half-pound to 13 stone 13½ pounds. This is just a quarter of a pound above the lowest yet, which was a total loss on a whole stone on the 22 March. I am hoping that this frustrating six-day plateau is coming to an end now. I am 13¾ pounds lighter than when we started the diet, but have made very little progress in the past eight days. We will be halfway through the eight weeks on Tuesday, and if I keep up the present rate of weight-loss I will be just under thirteen stone – a great improvement, but I would like to be half a stone or so lighter.

Oh, by the way. The ankles have been pretty good for the past few days – I almost forgot what this diary is supposed to be about!

No aerobic exercise worth mentioning today apart from the six-minute round trip to the local shop for the Sunday paper. And no mobilising exercises for neck, shoulders and back this morning, I remembered shortly before bedtime. Maybe none on Saturday morning either. Knowing how prone I am to shoulder pain when trying to enjoy a lazy spell before getting up, I did the neck and shoulders routine shortly before going to bed.

## **Monday 28 March 2016**

With the fringe of Storm Katie assaulting us with high winds and heavy rain, I decided to respect today's status as Easter Monday, a traditional holiday, and give my bones and muscles an extra day to recover from last week's walks (I can always do a walk on Saturday if guilt overwhelms me). The decision may also have been influenced by the fact that, as far as I can remember, I slept right through until about 7:45am and woke with both shoulders feeling really comfortable. While I was arguing with myself over this decision Pat decided to get up and fetch some tea. That did it: decision confirmed!

While I was waiting for her I decided to try going back to the ankle exercises I did so faithfully during the rehab period, and the ankles felt fine when I got up.

I have noticed recently that my resting heart rate seems to have settled at around 60 beats per minute. Before starting the diet, it was usually nearer 80. This has to be a healthy sign.

I stepped on the scale with some trepidation, as yesterday, with a scrambled egg and smoked salmon brunch and steak and green beans for dinner, had felt quite indulgent. Then there was the little issue of the two tiny sugar-coated chocolate eggs each which we allowed ourselves in the evening – a meagre but wicked Easter celebration. I need not have worried: my weight this morning, even after a cup of tea in bed, was 13 stone 12½ pounds – a pound lower than yesterday and my lowest yet by three-quarters of a pound, giving me a total loss since the 2 March of 14¾ pounds. Strange, after Friday and Saturday when we just 'ate carefully'!

We both had yogurt and prunes for breakfast and the no-carb ploughman's for lunch. Dinner was two modest pieces of salmon fillet with some green vegetables.

Tomorrow's weigh-in will be at the exact halfway point in the eight-week diet, including the product of today's eating. The time has passed really quickly – so far... We have asked Aidan to return the 'Fast' (5:2) diet books, because that is going to be the basis of our maintenance régime. Mosley recommends sticking to a Mediterranean diet on the 'eat normally' days, which I suspect is a departure from the

original Fast Diet. I downloaded the book to my Kindle and checked this later. I was right: the instruction for non-fasting days is 'eat normally' – the two days fasting at 600 calories (200 less than our current everyday allowance) with a long break between breakfast and dinner is what does the work. We normally have breakfast at a bit after 9am on weekdays, but there is no reason why I couldn't have breakfast alone at a little after eight, after my walk, which would give me an interval of close to 10½ hours.

## Tuesday 29 March 2016

Last night at bedtime I remembered that I had not done my neck and shoulder routine, so I did a slightly cramped version with only four repeats instead of eight under the sloping ceilings of our bedroom. I still got the benefit, only checking the time at 7am and feeling very comfortable for the remaining half-hour.

Kettle on, mash tea, teeth, loo, bidet...and *scales*. This was to be the real measure: the result of exactly 28 days of the eight-week diet.; half-way through. I stepped on the old scales and read 13 stone 10½ pounds. After logging this on a Post-It I thought I had better check – and this time I got 13:10¾. I thought I had better accept this, and was still amazed and delighted to have lost one and three-quarter pounds since yesterday – and a pretty thrilling 16½ pounds since the start. The plateau seems to have ended.

I thought about putting the splint on the right ankle, just for the walk, as the ugly cauliflower-shaped protruberance on the outside has gone right down since I wore it a few days ago. However, both ankles felt good, so I decided against this. I counted 43 paces from the field gate and stopped the watch at 30 minutes 5 seconds. I was a little puffed but soon recovered. I am wondering whether I ought to increase my walk to 40 minutes...

I read most of the background theory to the 5:2 diet yesterday. I am convinced that I will be able to cope with two days on 600 calories, with no lunch, which should keep some weight-loss going. Then there is the option of 6:1, which also promises considerable benefits from the fasting day and a good chance of maintaining weight. From what I am reading in the 5:2 diet book, intermittent fasting can have enormous benefits beyond mere weight-loss – even possibly reducing the risk of cancer!

Pat thinks I am becoming obsessive about the diets, but who wouldn't be with a 16½-pound weight loss in four weeks and the real prospect of reaching 33 pounds by the end. That is 2 stone 5 pounds, which would take me down to a healthy 12½ stone.

This morning I tackled a job which I used to do every few weeks but have not managed since the ankle problems became severe: vacuuming the entire floor of our upstairs bedroom and en-suite, which involves manhandling the very heavy blanket box, our even heavier Tempur divans and our surprisingly heavy bedside cabinets. The carpet is luxuriously thick, which makes vacuuming and moving furniture very hard work. I also vacuumed the tops of the Tempur mattresses thoroughly. By the time everything was back together I was pouring sweat and felt very hot, finishing the job stripped stark naked. I was still perpiring freely *after* my shower, and didn't stop for an hour or so afterwards. Adding the tasks of getting the heavy Sebo vacuum-cleaner up and down the stairs made this a pretty good work-out, which must have burned quite a few calories.

On the subject of calories, I have had a look at the spreadsheet I kept when using the *MyTracks* app to record my walks during the first half of 2015. For half-hour walks, the app recorded calory consumption of between 100 and 150 kcal, so my daily walks should be burning a significant fraction of my daily 800-calorie allowance. This morning's antics felt a lot more strenuous – and lasted a lot longer – than one of my walks, so that must have burned at least as many calories.



This afternoon I got a ladder and my rods out, hoping to clear the conservatory gutter, which I had assumed was blocked, causing water to get in and damage the top of the inside wall. It turned out not to be blocked. However, I did find a drain at the side of the house which was filled with gravel and sand, thanks to sloppy sweeping by the paving cleaner's assistant, and I cleared that instead.

I was particularly surprised at how easily I got down on my knees and up again using my right knee, which is the weak one.

So, all in all quite a busy and constructive day. I am beginning to feel more useful after the long rehab period.

### **Wednesday 30 March 2016**

I was wide awake early this morning, so I decided to get out early for my walk. After doing the toe and ankle exercises I got up, going through the usual routine of ablutions, tea and neck-and-shoulder workout (I did four repeats before bed last night and that really paid off in terms of sleep and comfortable lazing).

After yesterday's 1¾-pound weight loss, I was disappointed to see a half-pound gain this morning, but that still leaves me with a 16-pound overall loss.

Having missed my Monday walk, I decided to see if I could add ten minutes to each of the three remaining walks this week. Under a clear, blue sky, in dazzling sunshine and on legs feeling a little wobbly from yesterdays labours

I hit the 15-minute mark 25 paces short of the field gate and ploughed on down the hill to the tight bend. I hadn't thought I would reach the next gate at the end of the tarmac in another five minutes, but I arrived with the clock showing 14 minutes 50 seconds. I had forgotten how steep the hill was back to the first gate, but otherwise I had a reasonable walk back, stopping the watch at 40 minutes 10 seconds. I will follow this routine for the rest of the week and then decide whether or not to do 40 minutes every day.

We were watching out for the wheelie-bin cleaning van as we had asked a neighbour to send it to us. We thought the word hadn't got through, but the van turned up at about 9:30 this morning and our fresh-smelling bin is back in its place.

On Monday I realised that I had not refreshed the sourdough culture which I have maintained since I went on the course at the Welbeck School of Artisan Food in March 2011. It was a month since I had done this, and I feared that the colony might have died. 'O ye of little faith!' I tipped the whole lot into a bowl and added 100 grams each of water and strong flour, and the following morning I had a bubbling mass of healthy life. As a precaution I scraped this back into the container and weighed 100 grams back into the bowl with a further 100 grams each of water and flour. This morning the bowl was full of life. It is now in the fridge, and this time the diary entry on *Outlook* has a reminder set! I look forward to finishing the last batch of focaccia when the diet is over and baking some more. Apparently bread containing a lot of fat has a fairly low GI. Mine has 200ml of extra-virgin olive oil to a kilo of flour.

After coffee I did a small shop at the Co-op and then went up into the garage loft to tidy. Since Christmas, I had been in the habit of pushing boxes up the ladder and just shoving them along the loft floor in an ever-lengthening row, so I decided to climb into the loft and sort them out.

In the afternoon I decided that the brilliant sunshine had dried the grass enough for a second mow, so I got the mighty Atco out and turned the cutting height down to more of a lawn setting. I did the edges first – hard work manoeuvring the heavy brute around with no mechanical assistance – so that the rest was simply a succession of self-propelled stripes. Then I got the crummy Ryobi electric trimmer out, but there was very little line left and it got used up without making much impression.

Dinner was defrosted vegetable curry, for which I had to reduce the other half of the cauliflower to rice-like granules. Definitely one of the nicer Mosley dinners.

### **Thursday 31 March 2016**

I had no trouble getting up at 7:20am this morning, after enjoying an hour or so of lazing, though I did feel as if I could have done with another hour's sleep. I brought the neck-and-shoulder routine forward, doing it while the kettle boiled and the tea mashed before heading to the bathroom.

Then the scales, and to my disgust I had put on another quarter of a pound to 13 stone 11½ pounds – only ¾ of a pound up on the record low two days ago, and hardly significant, but still disappointing. I seem to be moving down a flight of steps instead of a smooth ramp!

I was out into a temperature almost exactly zero and bright sun shining from a lovely blue sky with a few patches of 'mackerel sky'. This time I was about 25 metres past the field gate before the watch reached 15 minutes and I was well inside 20 minutes when I reached the second gate. Luckily the boggy patch of path round the gate had dried out fairly well, so I could continue to the 20-minute mark, about 50 metres further. The return journey was harder work, but was interrupted by meeting Buddy, a little wire-haired terrier whom I know well. He was wandering around on the road, so I stopped the watch and tried to catch him – without success. The driver of a van joined me, but after several minutes the mischievous creature was still evading us. Then his owner came out and I got on my way, arriving home with 40 minutes 22 seconds on the clock, quite breathless and sweaty. If my half-hour walks were burning between 100 and 150 calories, then the new distance should be doing between 130 and 200 – a significant fraction of my daily 800 which should increase my weight-loss. In theory.

Most of the morning and part of the afternoon were taken up with power-washing the paving round the back of the house. This involved moving an awful lot of big plant-pots, so it was a more energetic task than it would appear. Full marks to Pat though – she attacked the front garden, digging up and removing masses of weeds.

### **Friday 1 April 2016**

After a fairly sleepless night, which included Pat bringing up cups of tea at about 1:30am! - I managed to get up at 7:25am, do all the usual stuff and get back from a 40-minute walk at 8:40am. This was not without pain after my chores through the week.

Another disappointing weigh-in: from a record weight-loss of 16½ pounds on Tuesday the scores are 16, 15¾ and today's 15¼ pounds. I know I have only put back 1¼ pounds, and Tuesday's weight may have been some metabolic freak, but having stuck religiously to the diet and walked an extra ten minutes a day for those three days I cannot understand what my mischievous body is playing at!

The bar chart which is automatically plotted as I add my weights to the spreadsheet shows a pattern of climbs and dips over the past 11 days, so maybe there is nothing to worry about...

My walking performance was less than wonderful, too, having started with sore feet, stiff and aching legs, and a protesting lower back. I was quite a distance short of the first field gate (my target for 15 minutes until this week) as the watch passed that time. I did manage to pull back, and was no more than 50 yards short of the second gate (my new target) at 20 minutes and home in 40 minutes 25 seconds.

Having cleaned the patio paving, I spent most of this morning bringing up the wooden garden furniture from its winter quarters: one round solid-teak table with six folding

chairs and one small square folding table with two chairs, followed by re-gluing joints on one of the teak chair seats.

### **Saturday 2 April 2016**

As I had made up the 30 minutes walking lost when cancelled Monday's walk by adding ten minutes of each of Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, I didn't need to walk this morning. I went downstairs at around 8:30am to make tea, did the ablutions and weighed myself.

After yesterday's mild disappointment I went straight to elated – I was back down to 13 stone 10¾ pounds, my record low from Tuesday with a weight-loss of 16½ pounds. Why my weight scores a low and then wobbles up and down, which shows clearly on the barchart generated by the spreadsheet (below), I really have no idea, but this seems to be developing into a pattern which has happened twice in the last twelve days. I just hope that by Tuesday – three more weighs – I will see a new low; otherwise this week's work will seem to be completely wasted.

The flatline on the future days is set at 12 stone, by the way – a way to go!

(*Excel* decided to colour the bars on the chart this way after having left them grey for a week or two. I have yet to find out how to get rid of the colours!)

We had a much lower-calorie dinner than usual last night – a microwaved fillet of smoked haddock, and dollop of cooked spinach and a poached egg each, followed by five canned apricots, finishing at around 7pm.

I am writing this at 12:30pm and we just realised that we haven't eaten anything for over 17½ hours, which is serious fasting. We had intended to have a brunch, but it is getting rather late!

While typing the previous paragraph, I realised that I was becoming a little light-headed – hypoglaecemia. We had a very late brunch of large open mushrooms dry-grilled and topped with baked beans (Branston, not Heinz, thankyou) and a small block of Cheddar grated over. As a special treat we had a small squirt of HP Sauce each.

This evening I made an attempt at a pearl barley mushroom risotto, but it took ages to cook and was still barely chewable. We managed to chomp through enough to last the night – way less than half the batch each – but it was very hard work. This was a pity, because the taste of porcini mushrooms and Parmesan was really good. Sadly, what we didn't eat went in the bin. One of my least successful cooking experiments. I don't think we took very many calories on board, so tomorrow's weigh-in will be interesting...

### **Sunday 3 April 2016**

...and wasn't it just! I came down to make tea at about 8:30am, did the ablutions and stepped to the scale. 13 stone 8¾ pounds – a whole two pounds lighter than yesterday. That brings my total weight loss in just under five weeks to 18½ pounds. I just hope I can keep this – or even improve on it! - for the two days until the end of the fifth week. It averages out at 3.7 pounds per week, which would give me a loss of just under 30 pounds, or two stone two pounds, after eight weeks and a finishing weight of 12 stone 11¼ pounds. And that's when I plan to start the 5:2 fasting programme...

### **Monday 4 April 2016**

I was quite worried that, after yesterday's sudden and dramatic loss of weight, that it might start creeping up, so I was really pleased with the tiny but definite loss of a

quarter of a pound when I weighed myself this morning. 13 stone 8½ pounds and a total loss of 16¾ pounds.

Tomorrow will be the end of the fifth week, so I would like to see at least a small additional drop.

Today's was scheduled to be the first of five 40-minute walks, and it went fairly well, if rather painfully. The left foot just felt a bit battered when I set off, and quite a lot more battered by the time I got home, but the times were good. I passed the first field gate, my old 15-minute mark, about 15 seconds inside that time, and I reached the new target gate 30 seconds inside the 20-minute mark. That meant I had to traverse the boggy patch round the side of the gate and go off-tarmac for about 45 seconds. I managed this without too much mess, and there were plenty of puddles on the way back to rinse the soles of my trainers. In spite of growing discomfort, I reached home with 40 minutes 25 seconds on the watch.

After an hour, and a shower, the left foot had calmed down. As I had to drive to Sheffield and back this morning that was a relief. I dropped Pat at Anton's and drove across the edge of Sheffield to Hillsborough to collect grandson Barney for a brief sleepover. He had said that he needed some of his university break to meet up with friends and his girlfriend, but neither of us had expected him to have a lunchtime dental appointment to morrow. Nevertheless, we had a pleasant afternoon and evening together, not least thanks to his brilliant guitar playing.

## **Tuesday 5 April 2016**

I got up at 7:15am this morning and went through the usual routine. This morning's weigh-in was the last of the fifth week of the diet, and as yesterday I was anxious that I wouldn't lose ground after Sunday's amazing two-pound drop. I was hugely relieved to find that, for the second day running, I had taken another quarter-pound off my weight: 13 stone 8¼ pounds, a total loss in the five weeks of 19 pounds, giving me a prediction for the eight weeks of just over 30 pounds.

Today's walk was quite a bit harder than yesterday's, with complaints from the left foot (not the ankle) and lots of standing water on the lane, but I managed to pass the first field gate 15 seconds ahead of the 15-minute mark and to reach the second gate 25 seconds ahead of the 20-minute mark. The two climbs on the way home were quite taxing, and I reached home with 41 minutes and 4 seconds on the watch. I recovered fairly quickly, with no pain from the foot, which managed to handle the clutch during a horrendous 45-minute drive to Barney's, much of which was spent waiting in jams with the pedal down.

It will be interesting to see whether the extra 50 minutes walking this week will affect my weight.

## **Wednesday 6 April 2016**

My shoulders were behaving really well when I woke up, allowing me to spend around an hour lying on my front with both arms stretched past my head – a favourite position if I can bear it, but which I haven't been able to enjoy very much recently.

I got up at 7:15am, eager to check my weight and get stuck into the morning's walk.

The weight was a relief again: nothing to get excited about, but a small but steady drop to 13 stone 7¾ pounds. The fall of two pounds from Saturday to Sunday had not been repeated, but the weight had gone down a quarter of a pound from Sunday to Monday and again from Monday to Tuesday, but half a pound from Tuesday to today, taking the total lost since the 2 March to 19½ pounds.

After a bit of a struggle on yesterday's walk, I was pleased to find no pain in the legs as I set out this morning and to slip into a fairly high pace-rate right from the start. I

felt comfortable and energetic, passing the first field gate in 14 minutes 25 seconds and reaching the second in 18 minutes 40 seconds – 1 minute 20 seconds ahead of the 20-minute target. I negotiated the mud at the side of the gate and walked on until the watch reached 20 minutes, which took me a surprisingly long way – maybe 150 metres – past the gate. I kept up the pace on the return journey, even quite enjoying the two little climbs (see yesterday for the contrast), and stopped the watch at home only four seconds past 40 minutes! I was quite hot and sweaty by the end of the walk but my breathing was easy - I had actually managed to sing and whistle for most of the walk – and everything felt quite good. At midday I still felt really good.

I tackled a small leak from the cistern of the bathroom loo, I hope – I left a small vessel under the offending pipe to catch any new leaks. Then I partly dismantled and flushed out the ball-valve on the upstairs en-suite loo to try to stop it whistling – again, only time will tell.

## Thursday 7 April 2016

I got up at 7:15am again today, eager to see where my weight was going and to try to improve on yesterday's excellent walk.

My weight was 13 stone 7½ pounds. I had started a new Post-It, so I didn't have immediate access to the weights for the past week or so until I fired the computer up after my walk.

The walk itself started, as yesterday's did, with the legs and feet feeling good and settling immediately into a fairly rapid pace-rate. I passed the first field gate in 14 minutes 5 seconds, 20 seconds less than yesterday, and reached the second in 18 minutes 25 seconds, 15 seconds less than yesterday. After 'the mud' I had got quite a lot further through the next field by the time the watch reached 20 minutes. I started to feel the strain a little on the way back, particularly when I reached the first (longer) climb, and the last stretch back to the house was getting hard, but I reached home with 40 minutes and 25 seconds on the clock, 20 seconds longer than yesterday. Recovery was quite fast, though when walking in socks on tiled floors my feet did feel rather like bags of marbles!

Since Sunday's amazing two-pound fall, the weight has been going down steadily but in very small steps of half and a quarter of a pound. This seems trivial, but each day has scored a new low, and my total weight loss since starting the diet is now up to 19¾ pounds – or 1 stone 5¾ pounds, or getting on for forty 250-gram packs of lard!

Tracing a rough line through the jagged summits of my *Excel* barchart with my mouse-pointer and projecting it to the end of the eight weeks still suggests a final weight of around 12½ stone, which would make me a very happy man.

I spent most of the rest of the day on my feet and my knees outside, trying to clear a blockage in the drain under the kitchen window, into which the sink and the dishwasher wastes drain. I experimented with boiling water, bleach and washing-up liquid, and then tried pushing the new garden hose from the manhole up to the point where the drain takes a sharp 90-degree turn with the nozzle turned to its most violent jet setting. This dislodged quite a lot of the nasty white curdy stuff that kitchen grease and detergents seem to generate, but didn't increase the flow from the drain much, if at all. Eventually I decided to visit the excellent little hardware store – a real old-fashioned ironmonger's – in the next village. I discovered, to my delight, that they actually sell caustic soda, which I thought had probably been banned for retail sale. I bought two 500-gram packs and used one to prepare five litres of mixture. At the time of writing I am waiting to see if this does the trick, having had a thorough shower to get rid of all the bad-egg-smelling crud.

This operation kept me on the move for several hours, which can only be good.

Disappointingly, even a second application of 250 grams of caustic soda didn't improve the flow from the drain.

### **Friday 8 April 2016**

I was lying awake worrying about the drain between 6am and 7am this morning, and although I was very comfortable I decided to get up at 7am to tackle the final 40-minute walk of the week.

My weight was exactly the same as yesterday's – 13 stone 7½ pounds, which was a let-down after the slow but steady fall through the week.

The exercises were rather hard, as my legs felt weary and my lower back was painful – a combination of yesterday's best-ever walk and the Great Drain Project, I assumed. The walk was even harder. I started at a reasonable pace but soon started feeling the strain. I reached the first gate in exactly 15 minutes and the second in 19 minutes 40 seconds. I decided that it would take me the odd 20 seconds to get round the muddy puddle beside the gate, so I turned back. Even with a slight starting advantage the watch showed 40 minutes 42 seconds when I got through the front gate.

A satisfying first week on the 200-minute target, though.

We skipped breakfast, planning a brunch towards midday because we were going to meet Alistair and family in Baslow for a pub meal – a real challenge for us!

I decided to have another go at the drain, prompted by something the guy in the hardware shop had said. I realised that I had made an obvious mistake when feeding the hose up the pipe: I had turned on the water first. This time I set the nozzle to its fiercest jet setting but turned the tap off which is fed my lovely new hose into the stinking pipe. Without the water jet's resistance this was much easier. Then, when I felt it pushing against something squishy and probably disgusting, I went and turned the tap on. The task then was to keep pushing and pulling the hose, hoping to dislodge some of the gunge and then wash it away. Quite a lot of the nasty white curds began appearing from the pipe. I turned the water off and emptied the washing-up bowl down the sink, and after a few false starts the drain started working. I kept up the good work and eventually I could empty an entire sink without the drain overflowing. Success!

Brunch was a two-egg omelette with a few dry-fried mushrooms each. Delicious!

I finally got round to booking the car in for its service and MoT for the 10 May.

We met Alistair's gang at the pub in Baslow and had an early dinner. We actually found things we could eat and drink without compromise: a tikka chicken salad with slimline tonic for Pat and an 8-ounce sirloin steak salad with Diet Pepsi for me. The steak was disappointing, tough and about medium-rare rather than the *bleu* I asked for, but to my amazement the Pepsi tasted really good!

### **Saturday 9 April 2016**

I had a lovely lie-in this morning and the relief of having lost a pound since yesterday. From a starting point of 14 stone 13¼ pounds (I had forgotten I was that close to the horrendous 15 stone!) I am down to under 13½ stone, if only by half a pound, with a total loss of 20¾ pounds. We still have over two weeks to go, and then we have the 5:2 fasting diet to look forward to – especially the '5'!

The barchart generated by *Excel* from my weight table is now at the end of this diary.

In the middle of the afternoon I walked down to the village post office to post a birthday card. This walk used to take me 7½ minutes each way, but today it took 10

each way. Nevertheless it was equivalent to half of one of my weekday walks so a useful addition to the week's exercise.

### **Sunday 10 April 2016**

A really disappointing weigh-in this morning. Having dropped from 13 stone 7½ pounds on Friday to 13 stone 6½ pounds on Saturday I went back up today.

This morning I decided to try life without some of my pills. I didn't take my morning doses of Naproxen (anti-inflammatory), Omeprazole (to protect my stomach lining against the Naproxen) or Cetirizine (anti-histamine for 'mild allergic rhinitis), all of which I have been taking for years, except when Mr Milner asked me to drop the Naproxen while I was on anti-clotting aspirin after the last operation.

I did decide to keep up with the Tamsulosin (to soften the shell of my prostate so I don't pee so much during the night).

Nothing to report for today apart from the usual 6-minute round trip for the paper.

### **Monday 11 April 2016**

I had a very bad night, getting up to pee at around 4am and never really getting back to sleep, so I got up at 7am for an early walk – not that I really felt ready for it.

I had a real surprise this morning: the scale showed 13 stone 3½ pounds, a drop of four pounds giving me a total weight loss since starting the diet of 23¾ pounds. I let it switch off and tried again, with the same result. I do hope this isn't an electronic error!

I was quite sneezy this morning and had a brief nosebleed into the towel after rinsing my face. I felt a little light-headed too, so I decided to reinstate the Cetirizine.

Today's walk was a little laboured on stiff legs (could I be missing two doses of Naproxen, or was it just lack of sleep?), but I made it to the first gate in 14 minutes 50 seconds and the second in 19 minutes 33 seconds. I was home again in 40 minutes 7 seconds.

I had another search for the missing bits for the drain rods later, but didn't find them. I *did* find some 'universal' accessories on the Web – the rubber plunger and the 'corkscrew' – which I ordered for just under £9 including delivery. I hope they really are universal. If so I should be able to clear the drain completely.

At bedtime my legs and feet were feeling quite stiff and sore, probably after sitting still all evening, so I took a Naproxen with my quarter-glass of semi-skimmed.

### **Tuesday 12 April 2016**

I slept really well after the previous night. I was aware of Pat sitting up to look at the clock and asked what time it was. Half past six, she told me. I rolled over again and when I was awake enough to look at my watch it was 7:10am. I had intended to get up at 7am, so I rolled out of bed straight away.

I had my fingers crossed as I stepped on the scale, dreading the loss of some of yesterday's amazing four-pound drop, so I was delighted to have dropped another half-pound: 13 stone 3 pounds – a total weight loss since starting the diet of 24¼ pounds.

The walk was easier than yesterday's. I passed the first gate in 14 minutes 45 seconds and the second in 19 minutes and 15 seconds, going on across the field until I clocked 20 minutes. It was a little harder going back: I got home in 40 minutes 50 seconds.

I changed our beds after breakfast, and did a Sainsbury's shop early in the afternoon. Otherwise it was a fairly lazy day.

Today is the last day of week 6 – three-quarters of the way through the 8-week diet. The novelty is definitely wearing off and I am looking forward to switching to the 5:2 Fast Diet. Looking at the spreadsheet, I think it might be a struggle to get down to 12½ stone from the present 13 stone 3 pounds in just two weeks. It is an arbitrary target, so we will just have to see...

### **Wednesday 13 April 2016**

A very disappointing morning after a few days of euphoria.

First came the weight – up by a quarter of a pound from yesterday's 13 stone 3 pounds. That's a trivial amount compared with this week's drop, but in the wrong direction again.

My lower back and legs had been painful coming downstairs, and by the time I had been walking for five minutes it was clear that my attempt to stop taking the tablets had been a really bad idea. Losing the Cetirizine had opened me up to hay fever symptoms, and stopping the Naproxen had clearly allowed my joints to start getting inflamed.

The walk's statistics speak for themselves. I seemed to be keeping up my usual pace-rate but my stride-length was well down, with the result that it took me 15 minutes 45 seconds – a whole minute longer than yesterday – to get to the first field gate and when the watch reached 20 minutes I was between 100 and 150 metres short of the second gate, which I reached yesterday in 19 minutes 15 seconds. I turned straight away, and when I got to the first climb my stride-length had shrunk even more. The journey home was a real labour and the watch was showing 41 minutes 23 seconds at our front gate.

I took two paracetamol as soon as I got home and reinstated most of my routine medication at breakfast time, leaving only the Omeprazole out as I have never had stomach upsets from anti-inflammatories and I really believe in taking as little medication as possible.

By then I felt well enough to go into town and walk all the way to Darren the fishmonger's stall as well as picking up some greeting cards. I found the cards I was looking for in M&S and then set out up the gentle slope through the market. My feet and legs were still a little uncomfortable, but nothing like they had been on the walk. I had an enjoyable chat with Darren and the walk down went much better: I was even overtaking people! Some time ago I estimated this walk at around one kilometre, so that was a useful addition to the day's mileage.

It was really good to be back to my old Wednesday routine, even if I didn't have much to get: life had taken another step back to normality.

This afternoon I made a start on pruning our plum tree, which is in full blossom but has grown in such a way as to make harvesting very difficult. I dealt with most of the thin stuff, and tomorrow – after consulting Pat – it will be a ladder-and-saw job.

Later, after messing around with *Opera* and *Firefox*, I set up *Internet Explorer 11* as my default browser. It may have irritating traits, but at least it shows web pages with the text at a reasonable size for my ageing vision.

### **Thursday 14 April 2016**

My capricious weight is still playing tricks. After the thrilling four-pound fall between Sunday and Monday, it has gone down half a pound, up a quarter and up another quarter to today's 13 stone 3½ pounds, the same as on Monday. That is a four-day flat spot, which is insignificant but irritating, but looking at it positively I am still four pounds lighter than I was on Sunday morning. Sunday was the end of a five-day flat spot. Overall, I have lost 23¾ pounds in 43 days – just over half a pound per day. If I



can keep that average up I will have lost another 6½ pounds, making a total of 30 pounds and a weight of about 12 stone 11 pounds – not quite down to my target 12½ stone, but that should be achievable quite quickly on the 5:2 régime.

All that is just me playing with my head and my spreadsheet, but it makes me feel better!

The walk today was much better than yesterday's, so I think I am going to have to keep up the Naproxen. I reached the first gate in 14 minutes 45 seconds, a whole minute less than yesterday, and the second gate, which I didn't reach at all yesterday, in 19 minutes 20 seconds. I stopped the clock at 40 minutes 7 seconds, over a minute faster than yesterday. The walk was far more comfortable after taking my anti-inflammatoris twice yesterday, and by the time breakfast was over my legs were almost back to normal.

My tree-pruning plans were thwarted this morning by a totally unforecast shower of rain that started when I was a few minutes away from finishing the walk and went on for an hour or so. I managed to get an hour in around 3pm but Pat objected to my plans for radical surgery, as I knew she probably would, so I got off with a bit of gentle deadwooding.

### **Friday 15 April 2016**

I was very comfortable during my lie-in from 6am onwards, which seems to have become a regular routine now. I was able to relax lying on both sides and on my front with my head facing both ways. However, I managed to persuade myself to get up at 6:50am.

My weight still seems to be on a plateau: it was down half a pound on yesterday at 13 stone 3 pounds, which is at least back to my all-time low after going back up to half a pound and a quarter of a pound above that. It really is puzzling – and frustrating! Looking on the bright side, it was at the end of the last flat spot that I suddenly dropped 4 pounds.

The walk was as comfortable as yesterday's, taking five seconds more, 14 minutes 50 seconds, to reach the first gate and exactly the same time, 19 minutes 20 seconds to reach the second. However, I reached the gate at 40 minutes 28 seconds, 14 seconds longer than yesterday. Pretty consistent, I thought.

That is another week of 40-minute walks completed.

After breakfast I did a very thorough vacuum-cleaning downstairs to spare Pat, whose back and other bits are playing up, while she did lighter 'precision' cleaning. I feel so much better now that I am able to make a real contribution around the house.

### **Saturday 16 April 2016**

A rest day at last! We had tea in bed and a decent lie-in.

My weight continues to frustrate me, jiggling up and down by a quarter-pound here and a half-pound there. Today it was 13 stone 3¼ pounds, a quarter-pound up on the lowest again. Last Monday it dropped by four pounds and then for five days it has hardly changed – I am virtually the same weight as I was after the drop with nothing more than minor oscillations in between.. Surely I must be due for another big drop soon – otherwise, why am I putting up with the blasted diet?

We went shopping in Retford this morning, and it was a real treat to be able to walk around without pain or problems. I picked up Dexter beef and rhubarb in the farmers' market, and we got various other things we need. This time it was Pat's turn to call a halt. I was all for cheating the diet with a milky coffee, but she was feeling a little unwell and chose to come home.

Lunch was a bit of a treat: a Whitby dressed crab in 'lettuce cups', although the crabs must be coming to the end of their season as the taste was a little bland.

### **Sunday 17 April 2016**

I was up early for a Sunday, rather desperately eager to see if my weight had fallen significantly – or at all. It had fallen, to a new low, but only a quarter-pound lower than the previous low at 13 stone  $2\frac{3}{4}$  pounds. That means the weight has stayed virtually the same for seven days since the amazing four-pound fall last Monday. As the barchart shows (on the page after the end of this diary), the rate of weight-loss has been very uneven with lots of flat and near-flat spots. I am beginning to doubt that I will get below 13 stone before the end of the diet in nine days.

I am beginning to wonder if the zero-everything flavoured spring water from the Co-op, and the Ricola sugar-free sweets of which we are eating rather a lot, are fooling my body into reacting as if the sweetness is from real sugar.

The consolation was our delicious Sunday brunch of two fresh eggs each from our neighbours across the road, scrambled with 50 grams of smoked salmon and, this time, a drop of cream rather than crème fraîche. Tonight we have small but handsome sirloin steaks from the Dexter herd about 15 miles away, with some nice stringless flat green beans.

After the Chinese Grand Prix I got the mower out and gave the grass a good cut.

The steaks were very good, and I ate lots of green beans.

### **Monday 18 April 2016**

I didn't wake until something after 6am, and was able to lie on my front with my arms stretched out 'above' my head for quite a while. I got up at 6:50am, eager to weigh myself. Finally I got a reasonable result: 13 stone  $1\frac{3}{4}$  pounds, a drop of a whole pound after wobbling up and down by the odd half- and quarter-pound all week. My total weight loss is now  $25\frac{1}{2}$  pounds, only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pounds short of two stone. My average weight loss per day is 5.2 pounds a day or 3.64 per week. If that is sustained for the next week I can reasonably hope to reach a total loss of about two stone one pound, taking me well below the 13 stone mark.

I hit what felt like a really brisk pace as soon as I was out of the gate, and this was confirmed by a time of 14 minutes 5 seconds at the first gate and 18 minutes 30 seconds at the second. I was at least two-thirds of the way across the next field by the time the watch hit 20 minutes. I kept the good pace going but was beginning to feel the strain on the first ascent and was definitely flagging at about four minutes from home. The watch stopped at 41 minutes 7 seconds, with me quite out of breath and sweating, even with a 5-degree air temperature.

I needed to get up the road to the barber shop by 9am for a much-overdue haircut, and we also needed a few items of shopping, including some decent coffee, so we decided to have brunch rather than breakfast and lunch today. I got to the barber's before 9am, when it should have opened, only to find it under new management and not open until 9:30, so I headed down the road to Asda (our cheapest source of Costa ground coffee), got what we needed and arrived back at the barber's a few minutes before it opened. The good news was the the 'new management' is my favourite hairdresser. I was cropped and home by about 9:45am. Brunch was grilled flat Portobello mushrooms with half a can of baked beans and a handful of grated cheddar – a rare taste of something that could pass as real food.

For dinner we improvised a sort of augmented no-carb ploughman's lunch: a small helping of ham, an avocado, two modest slices of cheese, a hard-boiled egg and a pile of salad from the bowl I made up the other day.

As we are getting near the end of the eight weeks of dieting, I have double-checked the spreadsheet data. Tomorrow is the first day of Week 8, and a week tomorrow – 26 April – is the start of our 5:2 dieting régime, the day we know our total weight-losses from the Blood Sugar diet and, more deliciously, the day we can start eating real food again!

## **Tuesday 19 April 2016**

Today is the first day of week 8, and I was hoping for a decent drop in weight, but was disappointed to see that it had crept back up three-quarters of a pound to 13 stone 2½ pounds. On the plus side, this is still the second-lowest so far, only surpassed by yesterday, but it still maintains the plateau with no significant loss for eight days: I am just a pound lighter than I was after the big drop last Monday. My target of getting below the 14-stone mark is beginning to look doubtful.

My neck, shoulders and lower back were very stiff this morning, and although I set out for my walk at a decent pace I knew I wasn't walking as well as I had yesterday. I reached the first gate in 14 minutes 30 seconds, well inside the 15-minute target but 25 seconds longer than yesterday. There was enough time on the watch at the second gate to justify carrying on, but I only got about 50 metres further. On the way back, the left foot was quite painful and the legs got stiffer, getting me home in 40 minutes 44 seconds, quite hot and puffing a bit.

Unusually, I was a lot stiffer and in far more pain than usual an hour after the walk. When I was setting the table for breakfast I realised that neither of us had taken our regular medication after dinner last night, so I was a dose behind on my Naproxen. That seems to confirm even more powerfully that the stuff really does work. I was more concerned, though, that Pat hadn't taken her diabetes medication.

After breakfast, I changed our bedding, including the incredibly heavy but wonderful John Lewis duvet cover. After this I needed a shower, and then I tried my new compression socks (delivered via Amazon Prime yesterday) for the first time. They felt very tight, and were quite hard work to put on, but felt comfortable once on.

In mid-afternoon I did a circuit outside with the backpack sprayer and dispensed plenty of RoundUp.

At bedtime the socks had shown no sign of falling down, so I had none of the usual deep rings round my lower legs, and I think my ankles were less swollen than yesterday.

## **Wednesday 20 April 2016**

After yesterday's slightly desperate attempts to look on the bright side about my weight, I was delighted to see the scale reading 13 stone 0¾ pounds this morning. That is a new low by a whole pound and 1¾ pounds lower than yesterday. If I can maintain the daily average, which stands at 0.53 pounds per day over the next six days, my finishing weight will be about 12 stone 11½ pounds – only 4½ pounds over the 12½ stone I hoped to reach. I just hope the statistical techniques are right!

I was definitely feeling better for being back on the regular doses of Naproxen, and the walk went well, if a little slower than yesterday: 14 minutes 55 seconds to the first gate and 19 minutes 40 seconds to the second, where I did a short loop on the field path. I was home in 40 minutes 34 seconds, ten seconds less than yesterday. I think I should be satisfied with getting to the second gate in less than 20 minutes and home in around 40, rather than pushing myself too hard. After all, the target is to do five 40-minute 'brisk' walks on five of every seven days – 10 minutes more than Dr Mosley's recommended 30 minutes. I can't help looking for progress, though!

This afternoon I did some gardening, digging and hacking unwanted roots out in the front garden, moving a hydrangea I planted last year and planting one of four

Japanese maples Pat has bought me for our 10<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The digging and shovelling left me hot, weary and with severe backache, and there are still two more hydrangeas and three maples to plant.

### **Thursday 21 April 2016**

After a really good sleep I woke up at around 6am as usual, but I must have gone back into a deep sleep because I had a really silly dream. I wanted to copy a DVD before giving the original to Anton, but then I remembered that the CD/DVD drive on the PC only writes CDs. I think this last bit must have been after I had woken up!

I got up as usual at 6:45am, eager to get weighed. In spite of a more productive visit to the loo than usual, thanks probably to the mushy peas we had with our smoked haddock and poached eggs last night, I was appalled to see that I had put back all the weight I had lost since last Saturday – up three pounds after yesterday's excellent drop. So much for yesterday's optimistic projection! On the bright side, my last big spike was followed by a four-pound drop...

We are almost at the end of the 8-week diet, with only five more days on the Mosley menu. Then we start the 5:2 Fast Diet, with proper food five days a week. Our major rewards are a wedding-anniversary lunch on the 1 May at Rowleys in Baslow and three nights from the 3 May at the Talbot hotel in Malton, North Yorkshire, where we once had a night and a meal when James Martin was executive chef. That includes two dinners in the restaurant and one in the brasserie, plus full breakfasts. I think fast days on Monday 3 and Saturday 7 May might be needed!

Following yesterday's note about the walks, I set out at a brisk pace but didn't push too hard. I passed the centre of the first gate in exactly 15 minutes and reached the second in 19 minutes 40 seconds, exactly the same time as yesterday. I did the 30-metre-or-so loop into the field to turn at 20 minutes exactly and was home in 40 minutes 20 seconds – actually 14 seconds faster than yesterday.

After breakfast I transported all the gardening bits out to the front and transplanted three plants from pots to the front garden. Two hydrangeas were in pots that bellied out and then in again towards the tops. They had been in the pots for some years so they had very well-formed root balls, which it took me about ten minutes each to unpot. The Camelia was new from the nursery and in a properly tapered plastic pot, so that was much easier. I had grubbed all the difficult roots up so digging the holes was much easier than the one I did yesterday afternoon. Nevertheless, I was relieved when I had got all the tackle put away.

After lunch I went up to the hardware store to get a new stiff broom so I could clear up the mess I had left to dry out after yesterday's and this morning's planting. After stopping at the Co-op for a few groceries I deployed the broom to good effect.

Checking my diet spreadsheet I was pleased to see that we only have five more days to go, including today.

### **Friday 22 April 2016**

I was very anxious to get on the scales this morning. I didn't make the four-pound drop after the big spike, but my 13 stone 1¼ pounds was two pounds down on yesterday's and my second-lowest so far by just half a pound, with a total weight loss of 26 pounds. We now have just four days, including today, of dieting left. Next Tuesday we start the 5:2 diet, which means that we only have to fit in two fasting days in the following seven. I think that we should have at least two or three 'off' days – the ones when we eat normally – between our last 800-calorie day and our first 600-calorie one (500 for Pat). Then we have to programme fast days around the anniversary lunch at Rowleys (Sunday 1 May) and the four-day break at the Talbot Hotel (Tuesday 3 May to Friday 6 May) – probably one in between the 26 April and

the 30 April and one on Monday 2 May to complete the first week. The two for the second week will have to be squeezed in after we are back from Malton: between Friday 7 May, our first day back, and Monday 10 May, the last day of the week. Once we get past those two weeks things should be simpler. Alternatively, of course, we could take a couple of weeks' break...

My legs seemed to set a really brisk pace all on their own this morning, in spite of some ache in the left heel, and this was confirmed when I reached the first field gate in 14 minutes 17 seconds and the second in 18 minutes 50 seconds. I crossed at least two-thirds of the field before turning at exactly 20 minutes, and reached home in a total of 40 minutes 33 seconds, weary legs having slowed a little towards the end. The left foot was a little painful all the way round, but not enough to slow me down. The support socks really seem to be helping. I ordered two more pairs yesterday and they arrived this morning.

I think that is the first full week of quick and fairly comfortable 40-minute walks with no really bad days, which is very encouraging. My leg strength and total fitness are obviously building well.

I decided to go back over the diary and gather all the walk data for another spreadsheet, which I completed at 9:30am and tidied up at around 11am. I was surprised to see that I have only been doing the full five 40-minute walks for three weeks after seven weeks of 30-minute walks, making a total of ten weeks at 150 minutes or more. It feels much longer!

I had a major fight with a tiny holly plant which has been struggling for survival in an incredibly awkward position, behind a big *cupressus* up against the garden fence. We wanted to move it into the border in the front garden, but it was obviously doubtful about that. I drenched it for a couple of hours with the hose and then dug round it – conifer roots permitting – but it was quite immovable. Eventually the tap-root snapped and the plant came free with just about six inches of root and a couple of filaments dangling. It is now in a pot of very wet compost in the hope that it may recover and thrive. It is a miserable-looking thing, but the home we have planned for it has several thriving hollies in it already.

### **Saturday 23 April 2016**

I am becoming increasingly frustrated with my weight. This morning I weigh 13 stone  $1\frac{3}{4}$  pounds, exactly the same as I did five days ago. Between then and now I have have weighed as much as  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pounds more than that and one pound less. Worse, as the barchart shows, I have made negligible progress over the last 12 days, and there are only three more weighing days before the end of the eight weeks. Having been only three-quarters of a pound short of cracking 13 stone I am now *one* and three-quarters short. And having clocked a total weight-loss of  $26\frac{1}{2}$  pounds three days ago the figure is only  $25\frac{1}{2}$  pounds today! Try to see a positive, that works out at 12.5% or one-eighth of my starting body weight lost.

Pat saw the GP this week after much urging from both Alistair and me, and he immediately booked her in for an MRI scan. To our amazement she got a letter this morning with an appointment at our local hospital, Bassetlaw, on Sunday (yes – Sunday) 29 May. At last, maybe we can get something done to control her awful pain and allow her to get a reasonable amount of sleep.

We had the mushroom, baked beans and cheese brunch just before we left to visit Alistair's gang and got off at about 10:15am, making what had to be our fastest time ever, arriving at their house just after 11:15am in spite of a typical Buxton bung-up. We had a pleasant time, but had to leave at just before 3:15pm because Pat was feeling really unwell with her back, hip and leg pains. We made good time on the way

home, too, arriving before 4:30pm. We were really amazed that the roads into and through the Peak were so clear (apart from blasted cyclists!) on a Spring Saturday.

A very lean venison steak from the Welbeck farm shop with Canellini mash went down very well at dinner time. The strawberries which should have been our little dessert, bought two days ago from our corner shop, were liquefying in the bowl, so we had a couple of lovely sweet (naughty!) dried figs each instead.

### **Sunday 24 April 2016**

We both had a very restless night for some reason, ending up sitting up and reading with cups of tea at around 4am. I got up to make some more at around 8:40am, after the usual ablutions and weighing. I was really pleased to see the scales reading 13 stone 0¼ pounds, a new low beating Tuesday's by half a pound. I only have two more weigh-ins before the end of the eight weeks, and I only need another half-pound to change the first number from 13 to 12. My total weight loss is now 27 pounds – 16.66% or roughly one-sixth of my 14 stone 13¼ pound starting weight and just one pound short of a two-stone loss. Just one more morning walk and two more weigh-ins to get me there...

Brunch was Pat's deliciously creamy scrambled eggs – two mixed with 50 grams of smoked salmon each. Dinner was some small rather tough lamb chops from Asda with, thanks to a quick trip to the Co-op this morning, half a dozen sticks of asparagus (Spanish this time). I ate three of the little chops while Pat filleted off the leanest bits from just one.

### **Monday 25 April 2016**

I was down early for the last-but-one weigh-in of the eight-week diet, I took a laxative sachet yesterday rather than Fibogel, but it didn't have much effect this morning. So it was with bated breath that I stepped onto the scale.

12 stone 13½ pounds! Finally, the wretched '13' was gone from the stones column. I had really been doubting that I would manage this, so I was absolutely thrilled. I have one more weighing to go, after this last day on 800 calories, to make the next landmark – lifting the total weight-loss to, or *over*, two stone from today's 27.75 pounds.

Unsurprisingly, I started the walk in a state of elation, and the legs joined in the fun by taking off at a decent pace. I didn't bother to record the time for the first field gate, but when I was fifty or so metres past I checked and it was 14 minutes 55 seconds. I reached the second gate with almost a minute in hand and did a short loop to the 20-minute mark in the field. The ascents on the way back were quite hard, but I was home again in 40 minutes 27 seconds.

We have some decisions to make this week. First, do we start 5:2 or allow ourselves a break? We are going to Rowleys for our anniversary lunch on the 1 May (next Sunday) but doing nothing else much, so we could fit two fast days- Wednesday and Friday would do it – in this week. However, the following Tuesday we are going on a three-night four-day break in North Yorkshire. That gives us Saturday, Sunday and Monday to fit in the second week's fast days. Two consecutive fast days are allowed, but would probably be a bit of a challenge for beginners. So Saturday and Monday would be favourites.

We made the usual visit to Anton this morning, taking him to his local Co-op for cigarettes. On the way back we stopped at Sainsbury's for some non-diet foodstuffs. *En route*, we decided that completing the eight-week programme successfully deserved a reward, so we agreed to wait two weeks before starting the 5:2 diet, avoiding the complications described above. So Monday 9 May looks like our starting date.

We had a rough approximation to the No-carb Ploughman's Lunch of ham, cheese and green stuff, clearing out the salad bowl in the process. I checked the freezer for leftover diet dishes and found only one Skinny Chilli, so that will be tonight's dinner, and the end of the diet.

Tomorrow night, off the hook, we will be having a mushroom risotto, and on Wednesday night our normal Friday dinner of roasted chicken wings and potato wedges. Among the goodies from Sainsbury's I bought a twin pack of Bonne Maman Crème Brûlée which will be tomorrow night's dessert, and we got strawberries and cream so that settles Wednesday's puds.

I defrosted my stash of Colston Basset Stilton and Lincolnshire Poacher Double Barrel yesterday, and I bought a Le Rustique Camembert today. My search in the freezer yielded the last few pieces of my last batch of sourdough focaccia, and any spare when I have finished with the cheese will get a dollop of Bonne Maman jam. We got strawberries and cream so that settles Wednesday evening's puds.

We had – and enjoyed – the Skinny Chilli for dinner. I cooked 140 grams of brown rice, which probably took us over the 800-calorie target for today, as did the generous spoonful of crème fraîche we dolloped on top, but this was the final meal of the diet!

## **Tuesday 26 April 2016**

In spite of last night's indulgence, I broke my second symbolic barrier this morning. After getting under 13 stone yesterday I cracked the two-stone barrier today: a weight of 12 stone 13 pounds and a total loss of 28¼ pounds. That is only half a pound lighter than yesterday, but all these statistical tricks really do help to keep me motivated.

Pat is quite upset because she hasn't lost much over a stone, but she did start the diet about three stone lighter than me. It also occurred to me while walking this morning – as always, looking for a positive – that 800 calories a day has been much less of a reduction from her normal consumption than mine, because she has been eating far less than me for quite a while now.

Overall, the barchart sticks reasonably closely to a straight line although the weekly weight-losses have fluctuated quite wildly: 3.75, 3.00, 4.75, 2.50, 2.50, 5.25, 0.50 and 3.50 – a high of 5.25 and a low of 0.50! The average daily loss was 0.51 pounds. I have lost 13.8% - well over one-eighth – of my starting weight.

It was a beautiful sunny morning, but very little above freezing with a fairly strong north-westerly wind. I was well past the first gate at 15 minutes and reached the second in 19 minutes 10 seconds, giving me a decent loop across the field. As yesterday the hills were quite a strain, and the watch stood at 40 minutes 56 seconds when I stopped it.

Breakfast for me this morning was quite similar to the diet one: half a glass of orange juice added, a little less yogurt, the same number of prunes and – at last! – two heaped dessertspoons of muesli. Definitely more 'satiating' than the diet version – I felt really well fed. Pat went back to her favoured Oatibix with semi-skimmed milk and a teaspoon of sugar, with about a quarter of a glass of Tropicana Trop50 (reduced sugar orange juice, which I should probably start drinking when my freshly-squeezed juice is all gone).

We had one each of our favourite Belgian Lotus 'caramelised' biscuits with coffee – the first real taste treat of the new régime, and it really was a treat.

I refreshed my stash of sourdough this morning, mixing 100 grams with 150 grams each of water and Allinsons' very strong bread flour.

For lunch I had two of the four very leathery pieces of sourdough focaccia that were left in the freezer, lightly buttered with Lurpak Spreadable butter, and modest pieces of Stilton, Poacher and Camembert. I spread the remaining piece of bread with Bonne Maman apricot conserve. Both the cheese and the jam gave me wonderful blasts of flavour.

Pat had a slice of toast spread with HP Sauce and topped with thick slices of Cheddar and tomato, grilled. Tea for both of us to drink.

With our 4pm cup of tea Pat had a ginger nut and I had a Ringtons triple chocolate biscuit, which I didn't enjoy as much as I had been expecting.

I will make the sourdough sponge before dinner (I usually do this just before bed) by mixing 300 grams each of sourdough, water and flour, ready to start the dough when I get back from my walk in the morning.

Tonight's dinner (Pat's choice) was mushroom risotto using the recipe in the first *River Café Cookbook*. The recipe serves six, so I just halved it to serve us two – not the most disciplined start for someone who is supposed to be keeping his weight under control. Not to worry – I am sure the two fast days a week will work the trick! In fact, we didn't get much more than halfway through the three-portion recipe, so there is probably enough left over for another dinner.

After dinner I ate about half of my Lindt milk chocolate Easter bunny. As with the afternoon biscuit, I didn't enjoy the chocolate as much as I was expecting. Nice, though!

### **Wednesday 27 April 2016**

Both my feet felt fairly battered when I got off my chair to prepare for bed, so I took two paracetamols, and by morning they felt a lot better.

I have decided not to pursue my weight obsession, but to weigh once a week instead of every day – maybe Friday morning before the fifth walk of the week.

I am also going to be a bit less OCD about the walk times. The aim will be to get past the first gate inside 15 minutes and the second inside 20, both of which I achieved this morning, and to turn back at exactly 20 minutes. I felt that I was flagging in the fourth quarter of the walk, but I got home in 40 minutes 17 seconds – with the feet feeling battered again. The key is to get to the second gate inside 20 minutes and home not long after 40 minutes.

Before breakfast I started making my bread dough, adding another 300ml of water to the sponge and then 300 grams of flour – effectively extending the sponge.

Breakfasts were the same as yesterday: half a glass of orange juice, two dessertspoons each of muesli and yogurt, five prunes for me; two Oatibix, semi-skimmed milk and one teaspoon of sugar for Pat. After the essential cuppa I started the dishwasher and finished building my dough, with another 400 grams of flour, 200ml of 50/50 olive and rapeseed oil (the olive oil was running out!) and 20 grams of sea salt, adding the flour in 200-gram, 100-gram, and 50-gram stages. This was scraper-kneaded until well mixed and then rested for 10-minutes. This cycle was repeated five times and followed by a 60-minute rest. I learned this technique at the Wild Yest Baking course I attended at the School of Artisan food on the nearby Welbeck estate (now the venue for *Bake-off Crème de la Crème*) and have stuck faithfully to it for over five years. The rest periods allow the moisture content to equalise and the sourdough bugs to work on the starch without the more normal hard labour of continuous kneading, and kneading in a bowl with a scraper, rather than on the worktop with both hands, is a lot easier physically and makes almost no mess at all.



But enough of that: this diary is about bones and how to manage them, not cooking!

I ate just Camembert and the last leathery bits of focaccia for lunch – much less than yesterday.

In the middle of the afternoon I ran a small errand to the surgery for Pat, picking exactly the wrong moment to set out. It started dri and within seconds a fierce westerly wind blew up out of nowhere. The rain got heavier, and more and more horizontal, and the wind cut straight through my second-best fleece. Fortunately, the wind and rain had both died down by the time I headed back home. April weather!

By 5pm the three focaccias were cut into 24 pieces, bagged and in the freezer, and before 6pm nearly a kilo of chicken wings and 20 potato wedges were oiled, seasoned and in a hot oven. With our best efforts we couldn't finish all the wings, so I have three pieces to eat cold at lunchtime with fresh focaccia.

After dinner I finished my Easter bunny and also had two of the tiny Green & Black's chocolate bars that came with it.

### **Thursday 28 April 2016**

It was a beautiful sunny, frosty morning with no wind and my legs were feeling quite good. I passed the first gate well inside 15 minutes and reached the second in 19 minutes 20 seconds. A quick loop in the field and then a less fatigued walk home, arriving in 40 minutes 23 seconds. That is my fourth 200-minute week almost over.

My feet had been quite painful at bedtime, after sitting all evening, but felt much better this morning and were much less uncomfortable after this morning's walk than after yesterday's.

This morning we went to the Crystal Peaks shopping centre. It was a frustrating visit for Pat, who couldn't find anything she was looking for. We did better in M&S, getting coffee and cakes and some much-needed new boxer shorts for me, plus food from the food hall.

I must have done something wrong when defrosting my first portion of the new sourdoughe it came out hot and was quite tough to eat. It had a lovely toasty flavour though. I'll pay more attention to the task today!

Later on I did a full downstairs vacuum clean and lit the wood-burner, because the weather was wet and cold and generally pretty miserable.

For dinner we had a 100-gram smoked haddock tail fillet and two poached eggs each, with boiled new potatoes and British asparagus from M&S, with plenty of butter. That was delicious, but the remaining strawberries from Sainsbury's were too sour to enjoy, so we will try the M&S ones tomorrow night.

### **Friday 29 April 2016**

I actually overslept this morning! I was up for my first (I think) pee at 5:50am and came to again when the radiator was quite hot (the heating comes on at 6:30am). It was 6:50am, ten minutes later than my usual automatic awakening.

The weather looked good when I got up, in spite of lots of rain during the night, and I set out with a spring in my step – surprising for the fifth walk of the week. The farmer has been busy preparing his fields this week, leaving masses of mud on the tarmac in the process, and the overnight rain had made the lane quite slippery.

Nevertheless, I passed the first gate 35 seconds ahead of target and the second 70 seconds ahead, getting the longest distance yet across the field, and turned at precisely 20 minutes. The wind was in my face, very strong and cold, for quite a lot of the return journey, making it quite a struggle to keep the pace up. However, I got

home in 40 minutes 41 seconds, 15 seconds faster than Tuesday in spite of the extra distance. My feet were quite painful, but that soon eased.

I unknowly trod some mud onto the carpets yesterday: it had been lodged in the treads of my trainers but when I walked in after a trip to the woodshed on very wet paving I printed footprints along the hall and across the sitting-room. I had to wait until the stuff had dried this morning so as to avoid working it deeper into the carpet. I decided to combine this with cleaning out the wood-burner and laying the fire for today, which turned out to be unnecessary because the the weather had turned much milder. The vacuum-cleaner lifted the muck perfectly.

I noticed that the inside freezer had not chilled down properly after having the door left ajar a couple of days ago, so my main task for the morning was to bag all the surviving contents< which were at least lightly frozen, and fit the bags in the outside chest freezer (some difficult decisions about what to keep and what to discard here!), and then to take the back panel of the freezer out and use a fan-heater to melt all the ice. Of course I had to clean all the drawers before putting them back, but by mid-afternoon everything was back together and the temperature was falling rapidly and had reached -14°C by bedtime.

### **Saturday 30 April 2016**

The bad news this morning was that the freezer had warmed up to about -1°C overnight. I switched fast-freeze back on and made sure the door was shut really tight, but at lunchtime the temperature was zero. I think I need to buy a new freezer – another dent in the domestic finances.

Both of us were restless by about 6:30am so Pat made some tea and we sat reading until it was a decent time to get up. She was going out with her friend Sue, so we got a quick weekend breakfast of porridge – the first since the diet. Once she had left I caught up with the final episode of *Line of Duty*, interrupting this to go up the road to collect some clothes which Pat was having altered, and to put my beloved old DuoFold windproof fleece in for a new zip and a couple of small repairs. Then it was back for coffee and the rest of *Line of Duty*, which really did get gripping.

By midday the freezer still hadn't started freezing properly, so I made even more certain that the door was sealed. We're going away on Tuesday for our three-day break, so there is no way I will move the food from its cramped but safe accommodation in the garage freezer.

Roast chicken and three veg for dinner this evening. What a treat!!!

### **Sunday 1 May 2016**

I finally accepted last night that the upright freezer was not going to sort itself out, so this morning, after anniversary croissants, I decided that I needed to get it unplugged before we go away on Tuesday (faulty appliance connected to mains in unattended house for three days?). In our incredibly cramped utility room this involved pulling the tumble-drier far enough out of its slot next to the washer (which is next to the offending freezer) to allow me to unplug it. I had to use the long kitchen tongs to reach through the narrow slot and, after three or four attempts, pull the plug out of the socket (which, of course, didn't have a switch!).

Then the fun began. Because the lovely people from whom we bought the house had been too mean to tile the whole floor, instead leaving a lower area of bare screed for the appliances, I had put a piece of board to the back of the slot to lift the rear legs of the washer and drier, and it has always been fiendishly difficult to get them up the step. After a sweaty wrestle I decided to leave this refinement until tomorrow because I didn't want to have a second shower before heading for Rowleys. The only

drawback with this arrangement is that the vacuum cleaner can't be wheeled into its usual storage space.

After a shower, we went off to Baslow, the Rowley's bar and restaurant. The lunch, sadly, was rather disappointing, to the extent that I mentioned this to the waitress, and when the bill came she had cancelled one of the starters.

We stopped at the Chatsworth Farm Shop on the way home and bought some goodies for a sort of snacky sitting-room picnic, which was a pleasant way to end the day. We had a bottle of Prosecco, of which I drank all but Pat's one flute.

### **Monday 1 May 2016**

I decided that I would have a walk this morning, but it was hard work. My legs were stiff and the left lower leg and foot was aching from the start and aching quite badly by the end. Nevertheless, I got to the first gate with ten seconds to spare and the second with half a minute in hand. I was struggling towards the end, though, and the watch was reading 40 minutes 49 seconds when I reached home.

We went to see Anton later in the morning and then spent the rest of the day getting ready for our short holiday in North Yorkshire, as well as trying to leave the house in a decent state so that it is a pleasure to come home to.

So I am going to sign off from this diary now and will report back at the weekend.

### **Saturday 7 May 2016**

We got back from our trip to North Yorkshire at around 2:30pm yesterday.

We visited York on Wednesday, thanks to an excellent park-'n'-ride service, with a rarebit lunch at the famous Betty's. On Thursday we tried to get into Scarborough for the second time and once again failed to find our way to the sea front. Stepson Aidan had said the place was rubbish, and we were inclined to agree. We ended up in Whitby, where we had a marvellous trip round the bay in on the of town's retired lifeboats, skippered by her one-time coxswain – a real comedian – and finished with a takeaway box of local scampi and chips, eaten in the car because it was too windy to eat outside. We potted up the coast looking for an accessible beach, but the tide was very high and sand was in short supply. Yesterday, on the way home, we stopped off in Beverley for a couple of hours of shopping and had lunch at Carluccio's.

Our hotel was mostly good, though we preferred the brasserie to the fine-dining restaurant and changed our third dinner booking accordingly.

This morning, unsurprisingly, I found that I had gained 3¾ pounds since last Saturday, having put on four pounds then. The 5:2 diet is definitely going to start this week, with fast days on Tuesday and Thursday.

I managed to mow the grass later in the day.

### **Monday 9 May 2016**

We had a lovely day yesterday with a visit from Alistair, Julie, Ewan and Tom. With a paddling pool on the lawn the boys occupied themselves really well. Julie and I managed to get the dead freezer out of the utility room and onto the drive – no mean feat! - for collection by the council.

This morning was beautiful, but my legs and feet had really suffered from four days of mooching around town centres last week. My legs felt stiff and tired and my feet were still aching even before I set out for my first proper walk in over a week. I was five seconds late at the first gate and about 15 metres short of the second when the watch hit 20 minutes. With a real struggle, particularly on the ascents, I got home in a

dismal 41 minutes and 50 seconds. I hope that has laid the foundation for a rapid recovery of form!

The main targets for today were to arrange collection of the old freezer, order a new one and sort the utility room out to receive it. The first two tasks took no time at all online, but the third was a major undertaking. The new washing-machine is monstrously heavy and I hadn't been able to get it, or the tumble-drier, back to the wall under the worktop since it was delivered a few months ago. I needed to get behind the drier to repair the air duct, and the only way to do this was to pull the drier right out and then slide it along in front of the washer. Unfortunately, because the washer was sticking out by about six inches this was not possible. With the freezer gone I was able to get alongside the washer and lift the left-hand side, allowing me to bully it back a little. By tilting it one way and then the other I managed to get it most of the way back. I had to open the washer's protruding door to get the drier past it, and then climb over the drier armed with a big roll of gaffer-tape and a pair of scissors. I did a bit of surgery on the two ends of ducting that had come apart and deployed a good few feet of tape to hold the two halves together. Finally, I managed to get the drier right back too, which in turn allowed our Sebo vacuum-cleaner to be docked in its normal place.

I cleaned out the space left by the freezer and gave the floor tiles a fairly violent scrub, and was quite proud of my handiwork when Pat came home from Anton's. After all that, I had a long, slow shower.

## **Tuesday 10 May 2016**

Our plans went a bit pear-shaped today because the hospital called yesterday offering Pat a cancellation for her MRI scan, which should have been in about two weeks. Could she manage 8:20am this morning? Of course, she accepted it, so my walk had to be postponed: I will do one on Saturday to make up five for the week. It also disrupted the car service and MoT, for which the garage were supposed to collect it after 8:30am: we had to change this to 10am.

As I write this (at 10:20am) I am waiting for the garage guy to arrive so I can get changed ready for whatever the day brings. This includes the delivery of the new freezer, which is due around midday. Yesterday I made up a short extension lead so that it can be plugged in over the worktop, because manufacturers don't seem to provide a power switch, and the previous freezer was plugged in behind the washer and drier, making defrosting a major pain.

We also decided to change the schedule for our first week on the Fast Diet, fasting on Wednesday and Friday rather than today and Thursday.

The new freezer arrived at midday – and it does have a mains on/off button. The inadequate instructions told me not to connect to the mains for at least three hours after installation, presumably to allow the refrigerant system to recover from its bumpy journey in the van. At 3:30pm, after wiping the drawers out with a weak bicarb solution, I switched on at the wall socket and on the freezer control panel. There is a button that allows you to select the required temperature, so I set this at -22°C and put the probe of my kitchen digital thermometer in the middle drawer with the cable led out on the hinge side of the door.

The freezer seems like a real improvement on the previous one. The interior capacity is smaller because the walls are much thicker, and the plastic drawers sit on metal rod shelves rather than just sliding in groove in the plastic sides as those in the old appliance used to do until their flanges broke and they started slipping down out of the grooves. There is obviously a microprocessor control system, though with a pretty rudimentary user interface. It will be interesting to see how long it takes to get

down from +22°C to -22°C...I am really looking forward to getting the stuff I transferred to the garage chest freezer back in the house.

By around 5pm the thermometer was showing -18°C, so I started ferrying the carrier-bags from the outside freezer to the new one.

### **Wednesday 11 May 2016**

As far as I could remember, I slept right through until about 6am, though my half-full water glass suggested that I had been up for at least one pee. I was blissfully comfortable lying on my front – a miracle considering all my physical tasks this week – and kept a careful eye on my watch. I did toe and ankle exercises just after 6:30 and got up at precisely 6:40.

I was really pleased to see the thermometer reading -23.7°C when I got downstairs. I turned the setting down from -22°C to -20°C.

I did a full set of neck, shoulder and back exercises before visiting the bathroom and set out for my walk as soon as the 7am news finished, thinking that the sciatic nerve pain I have been having lately needs a regular régime of lower-back exercises.

The walk was a little better than yesterday's. In spite of lots of big puddles from the night's heavy rain (which I decided to paddle through rather than take to the soggy grass verges) I was only five seconds late at the first field gate and ten seconds early at the second – nowhere near enough to justify negotiating the muddy puddle at the side of the gate. I finished the walk in 40 minutes 17 seconds.

By 9:30am the digital thermometer was showing -22°C, just two degree lower than the setting I had put on the freezer – pretty accurate for a domestic appliance.

After lunch I went into the utility room to restore some order following the chaos caused by emptying the dead freezer and commissioning the new one. The real triumph was getting the washer and drier right back under the worktop, allowing the Sebo vacuum to get back into what was originally designed as the 'Dyson Dock'.

We have decided to postpone starting the Fast Diet until next week, partly because the car was in the garage for servicing from yesterday morning until this afternoon. We need to do some menu planning and shopping before we can really do justice to the diet.

During the afternoon A quick freezer check confirmed that the meats I put in yesterday were frozen rock-hard. I bagged the steaks, burgers and sausages we bought in Malton and put em in the new freezer.

Dinner was leftover sausages and a burger from Sunday's barbecue, with some nice Jersey Royals we got on a small shop at Asda this morning and some Branston baked beans,

Just before bed I finally remembered to do the floor exercises for my lower back.

### **Thursday 12 May 2016**

I got up for a pee at 2:30am this morning and then slept through to something after 6am. Again, I was really comfortable in bed and when rising time approached I was sorely tempted to award myself an extra ten minutes. However, I did the toe and ankle routine at 6:30 and got out of bed at exactly 6:40.

A quick freezer check confirmed that the meat I put in yesterday was frozen rock-hard.

Today's walk was better than yesterday's in that I reached the first gate with ten seconds to spare and the second with thirty. However, my left foot and my thigh muscles were protesting, and I flagged on the way back. getting home with the watch

showing 41 minutes 10 seconds. I will see how tomorrow's walk goes and decide whether to do the full five for the week, which will mean only one rest day at the weekend, or to settle for four and hope for a better performance next week.

My first task for this morning was to cook two packets of dried peas, producing a small stockpile of frozen mushy peas, which (along with baked beans) are one of the best bowel regulators I know! The peas had been soaking since yesterday morning, and while they were boiling gently I did today's floor exercises. I think I should probably do these twice a day until my sciatic nerve pain settles down. The peas took about five times as long to cook as the instructions suggested but I eventually filled three 500-gram boxes and put them in the fridge to chill before freezing.

The rest of the day seemed to dribble away, with emptying the paddling pool after Sunday's fun and games more-or-less the high spot.

### **Friday 13 May 2016**

I had a fall in the garden two or three days ago. I was dragging the barbecue cover and stepped on it, losing my balance and bruising both knees. Since then my ribs on the left have been very tender, and I have assumed that I banged them, too. This discomfort was quite severe in bed this morning, and by the time I was ready to get up I thought I would have to cancel today's walk and had pretty well convinced myself that I had appendicitis and was in serious danger of peritonitis! A quick google reassured me that my pain was nowhere near the appendix, and by the time I had given yesterday lunchtime's baked beans free rein, done my neck and shoulder exercises, and had a cup of tea I decided to go ahead with the walk. I was five seconds late at the first gate, ten seconds early at the second and home in 40 minutes 28 seconds. My legs were not very happy, but some of the strain was relieved by stopping the clock to direct a lost motorist back to the road and get an update on one of the dog-walkers' cancer (very good news, I was delighted to hear).

I did the floor exercises as soon as I got in.

This morning was dull, cool with only a gentle breeze, and the forecast was for these conditions to continue, perhaps with sunny intervals. I decided it would be a good day to go round with the weedkiller. I mixed five litres of RoundUp in the cheap Chinese 16-litre backpack sprayer and – I hope – hunted down every scrap of green on the block paving driveway. Then I went over the area which Pat had done such an amazing job on and finally down the side entry and the whole of the paved and gravelled areas in the back garden. Now we have to wait about three weeks before we will know how successful I have been.

This light exercise seemed to have eased the stiffness from my legs, but I still decided not to do the week's fifth walk tomorrow. I think I need my two rest days.

Before lunch I re-heated the stock I made from the bones and bits of the chicken wings we had for dinner earlier in the week and transferred it into a bigger pan and boiled it up ready for the bits from tonight's wings.

### **Monday 16 May 2016**

Saturday's weekly weigh-in provided some slight compensation from the previous ones. Having gained four pounds in the first week after finishing the Blood Sugar Diet and another 3¾ pounds in the week of the Malton trip, I was pleased – and amazed – to find that I had lots 1¼ pounds over the past week, with no effort at dieting. So from the low of 12 stone 13 pounds at the end of the diet I am up 6½ pounds. This is nearly half a stone, but this week we start the 5:2 diet, which I hope will help to get the weight back down.

It will also be the first full week of walking after missing four in the week beginning the 2 May and done only four last week.

This morning's walk, in lovely spring sunshine, was quite good: I was five seconds inside the 15-minute target at the first gate and 20 seconds inside the 20-minute target at the second. I did a very short loop into the field and got home in a total time of 40 minutes 32 seconds.

Pat had a reunion with a long-lost cousin today so we had a very long drawn-out pub lunch and ended up having a bowl of Oatibix for tea. She had a wonderful time reminiscing and catching up on family gossip with Maurice, who is older than my 73 years.

But tomorrow will be our first fasting day. We are hoping to get some of Sainsbury's excellent smoked haddock which we will have for dinner tomorrow and Thursday nights, having had zero-fat yogurt with a little fruit for breakfast and nothing but water and black tea and coffee through the days – 500 calories for Pat and 600 for me.

## **Tuesday 17 May 2016**

I was up on the dot of 6:40am this morning, eager to get to grips with Fast Day One. I brewed a pot of Lapsang Souchong and drank a cup without milk, finding it very pleasant.

The walk was marginally better than yesterday's: ten seconds early to the first gate instead of five, 25 at the second instead of 20 but home in 40 minutes 39 seconds instead of 40:32. The last time may be explained by the fact that I didn't look at the watch quickly enough on the short loop in the field and was a few seconds late turning round. So the times for yesterday and today are remarkably consistent, though I was far more comfortable today.

We had 150 grams each of natural yogurt (zero fat -yuk!) with fruit for breakfast. I had a banana with mine, making a 200-calorie breakfast, and Pat had 100 grams of blueberries, making her total 150 grams. That means that tonight's dinner of smoked haddock, poached eggs and cooked spinach will need to be 400 calories for me and 350 for Pat to make up my 600 and her 500. Between now and then we will drink water, black tea and black coffee – no calories at all for about nine hours. And that is the basis of the diet: two days like that out of every seven. The recipes in the Mosley are elaborate, presumably to avoid boredom, but we think that breakfasts quite like what we eat every day and a delicious dinner of smoked haddock might do us very well for every fast day.

We went across to Anton's late in the morning and stopped at Sainsbury's on the way home. Among a number of other things, I got two packs of smoked haddock, which will keep us going through this week's fasting days. We had strange milkless cups of tea (jasmine for Pat and Lapsang for me) and then, while Pat started the week's ironing, I went out and mowed the lawn, ready for the rain forecast for later in the week and the weekend.

I did the sums to work out our portions for tonight and it all got rather complicated. The woman's dinner is 200 grams smoked haddock (202 calories) with a large poached egg (90 calories) and 100 grams of spinach (23 calories). That would make the man's portion of haddock 240 grams and of spinach 120 grams. The packs of haddock only contain around 250 grams of fish each. That would give a woman about 115 grams (116 calories) and a man around 135 grams (136 calories). We have two packs of spinach weighing 180 grams each, totalling 360 grams (83 calories). If we share the spinach equally and have an extra egg (90 calories) each the woman's meal will total 337 calories and the man's 357, both of which have more calories than we are allowed. So if we don't eat all the spinach we should be about right. If we only use one pack of spinach we will be below our limit, but not by very much.

The meal was a real treat, though I could have done with something sweet, rather than just a cup of Earl Grey tea without milk, to finish! We thought about having another cup before bed but decided to settle for water.

### **Wednesday 18 May 2016**

The first fast day had no ill-effects on my night's sleep. I woke at about 6am and was comfortable enough to enjoy lazing and dozing until I got up at exactly 6:40.

My cup of tea *with* milk tasted quite luxurious. However, I didn't feel hungry at all, so I set off for the walk without the biscuit I thought I might need! Rain was forecast, so I wore a sweatshirt and cagoule, which turned out to be a wise move: it started to drizzle just as I went out.

The legs felt a little heavy after yesterday's jaunt to Anton's and round Sainsbury's, followed by wrestling the mighty mower round the lawn. However, I improved on all Monday's and yesterday's times with 15 minutes in hand at the first gate, 35 at the second and a finishing time of 40 minutes 21 seconds.

On the return journey the rain got moderately heavy and a brisk wind was blowing in my face as I walked westward. The first puddles were beginning to form before I got home, wet enough to hang the cagoule over the bath and towel myself off.

We went to pick up my repaired fleece from the next village up the road and then stopped off at the new butcher's shop. The young proprietor had recently left our current favourite, Eaton's in Tickhill, and I bought a quiche, a pork pie, some mince and some rib-eye steaks at three for a tenner. After yesterday's fast, a slice of deliciously hammy, cheesy quiche, another of excellent pork pie (not gaps in the jelly at all) and finally one of ripe Le Rustique Camembert made a memorable lunch. Dinner was an ancient tin of cassoulet, bought in France and just in-date. Not bad, with plenty of white beans to keep things moving.

### **Thursday 19 May 2016**

Pat had a very early (8:45am) appointment at the hospital today, so I got up at 6:10am, half an hour before my usual time. My visit to the loo was disappointing after so many beans last night. As today is our second fasting day I had a cup of milkless Earl Grey tea before setting out on my walk.

Amazingly, I reached the first and second field gates in *exactly* the same times as yesterday, to the second. However, even more amazingly, I got home in 19 seconds less time than yesterday.

Breakfast was a repeat of last-week's start to the fasting days: a 150-gram tub of zero-fat plain yogurt from Yeo Valley with, in my case, a banana and in Pat's some berries. I should have had a tablespoon of muesli and well, and Pat's breakfast was missing a slice of ham, so we are both taking in less than 600 calories on our fast days. We haven't felt any the worse for this so we might as well stick with it.

I have decided to do my weekly weigh-in on Friday rather than Saturday, as I often have a cup of tea before getting up on Saturday.

I wrote this at 2:45pm, having had one black coffee and several cups of Earl Grey and Lapsang, but was not feeling the strain at all. I got through the afternoon comfortably and really enjoyed the smoked haddock, eggs and spinach. Pat, on the other hand, is struggling with irritable-bowel syndrome and her various bone problems. After dinner she could only drink her tea with some milk, so I put in two tablespoons (30ml) of semi-skimmed. I reckon we are well under our daily calorie allowance, so this 15-calorie dose of milk drunk immediately after the meal shouldn't have done any harm. I stuck to my black Earl Grey and Lapsang, and had another cup just before bed instead of my usual small glass of milk.



## Friday 20 May 2016

Today's was my first Friday weigh-in and the result was staggering: 13 stone  $1\frac{3}{4}$  pounds, a full four pounds lower than last Saturday and only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pounds above the lowest at the end of the eight-week diet. If this continues, I will be wondering why we put ourselves through 56 days of that one!

Buoyed by this result, I set off for my walk at a good pace and was much faster on the out-lap than yesterday: 35 seconds in hand at the first gate and twice as much, 1 minutes 10 seconds in hand at the second. Of course, this meant I had to add of a chunk of the field path to get to 20 minutes and so had further to walk back. I was fine until the last ten minutes or so, after which my legs were tiring and my back was getting sore. My finishing time was a poor 40 minutes 53 seconds.

This week is the first with five full walks for four weeks.

I have decided to be very strict with myself on the Fast Diet, consuming no calories between breakfast and dinner and none between dinner and the next day's breakfast, which means in effect that I am doing fasts of roughly nine and fourteen hours back-to-back twice a week. I will also try to err on the side of caution with the meals, keeping my calorie total below 600 a day.

Two tablespoons of muesli with three of full-fat Yeo Valley yogurt and five stewed prunes, accompanied by half a glass of orange juice 'with bits' and followed by a cup of tea with actual milk in it made a delicious and satisfying breakfast.

Shortly after that we went to Aldi, originally for some flowers to brighten the house and some 'De Luxe' choc-ice lollies – their budget but excellent alternative to the ludicrously expensive Magnum. Somehow we managed to fill a large trolley and spend over £100. Then we went to Sainsbury's for some more of their excellent smoked haddock fillets to be frozen for the next week's fasting dinners (maybe we will eventually branch out and have something different for dinner but for the moment the haddock, eggs and spinach dish does us very well). We needed one or two other bits and pieces including smoked salmon for Sunday breakfast, cream for scrambled eggs, also for Sunday breakfast, and a backup Camembert. After unpacking, we had a lunch of focaccia (mine) and crackers (Pat's) with pork pie, quiche and Camembert. Oh, the joy of a proper meal after a fast day!

I took a chicken for Sunday and a small container of home-made bolognese sauce for this evening (to be served in a taste test of wholegrain spaghetti) out of the outside freezer.

This afternoon I potted two of my little Japanese red maples and then did a very thorough vacuum-clean downstairs, including shifting two heavy settees and my recliner to vac underneath and – we hoped, in vain – to find a little silver box of which Pat is very fond and which we haven't seen since grandson Tom was playing with it a couple of weeks ago. I did find a folded ten-pound note down the side of my chair, but that was no consolation to Pat.

## Monday 23 May 2016

We had a rude awakening at 6am this morning with the burglar alarm going off. I dashed downstairs and cancelled it, producing a power-failure report on its little screen. I discovered that the residual current device (RCD) on one bank of the consumer unit had tripped – I have no idea why, as it re-set quite normally.

This morning's walk was a continuation of last week's steady progress, with a five-second improvement at each field gate. However, I seemed to get quite a lot further across the field, but got home far more quickly: 40 minutes 11 seconds compared with 40 minutes 53 seconds on Friday. So I managed almost exactly the same performance on the way out but was in better condition for the return journey. There

was no significant pain in either foot and my legs still felt strong at the end of the walk, for the first time during the current programme.

Nothing notable happened during the day apart from Andy Murray's strange and unfinished match against Radek Stepanek. I can't wait for the finish tomorrow...

## **Tuesday 24 May 2016**

This morning's walk, in glorious sunshine, was another improvement. 15 seconds faster than yesterday at the first gate and ten faster at the second gate with a correspondingly longer loop in the field but getting home in only five seconds more. In spite of a temperature of just 9°C and just a fleece over my shirt, I was very sweaty when I got home. However, the legs and feet had felt good throughout the walk and still did after a short sit-down. They really are getting stronger now – it is almost a pleasure to walk up our spiral staircase, in spite of the slightly odd way I deal with stairs on my right foot.

Today is the first fast day of the third week. I lost one pound in the first week and an amazing four in the second. Pat told me this morning that she had actually put on a pound since last week – weird. What will this week achieve?

We picked up plenty of the lovely smoked haddock from Sainsbury's, so we will stick to that for dinner this week.

While waiting for Andy's match, I did my fortnightly sourdough refresh and then decided to try making some jam from three punnets of rather third-rate strawberries. The result probably won't compete with our much-loved Bonne Maman, but it might make jam-tart filling or compôte for desserts. I also had the chicken carcass stripped last night to boil up for stock, which helped to pass the time.

After lunchless lunchtime I decided to cut the grass. Hauling the mighty Atco around what passes for our lawn was relatively easy, but crawling round the edges with the shears to tidy up the stuff the mower cannot reach was much more of a strain. I got brownie points from Pat for doing that, though.

I was feeling quite hungry as I drank yet another cup of black tea at around 4pm, and was very pleased when the time came to cook our regular fast-day dinner of a 120-gram smoked haddock fillet, two poached eggs and half a bag of spinach. This went down very well, but not having anything absorbent (bread or potatoes would be good) to mop up the rich orange yolks of our neighbour's lovely eggs was frustrating. Maybe I will cook them a little longer on Thursday...

## **Wednesday 25 May 2016**

I was awake at 5:30am this morning and totally comfortable lying on my stomach until 6:35. However, when I began the neck and shoulder exercises I started feeling a sharp pain over my right shoulder-blade, something I suffered from a lot twelve to fifteen years ago. The shoulder exercises didn't improve this, and when I started walking the arm-swing was quite painful. Fortunately, this eased quite quickly. Typing isn't doing it much good, though.

The walk results were a little disappointing, particularly so since this was the first day since the beginning of last week when I wasn't faster than on the previous day. I was 25 seconds slower than yesterday at each of the two gates, so with a shorter loop across the field, but took 8 seconds longer to get home. I wondered if the lack of calories in my system after yesterday's fast might have caused a lack of energy, but there was no similar pattern in the last two weeks. To avoid negative feelings I need to remember my objective: to do at least 40 minutes each day and reach the two gates inside the targets of 15 and 20 minutes. Today's 'disappointing' times were 30 seconds inside the target at the first gate and 60 at the second.

I am not sure whether I have mentioned this before, but I try to complete my walks without breaking stride more than absolutely necessary – for example, to avoid getting run over! If I stop for a chat I pause the stopwatch so that only actual walking times are recorded, but on the majority of days I walk more-or-less continuously.

My legs and feet were almost painless during and after the walk, so everything is obviously settling down. The left ankle will be x-rayed again in just under a month and I think there should be an improvement. The wrecked right ankle is ploughing on quite cheerfully.

My breakfast of whole-milk yogurt with muesli and prunes was sheer luxury, as was the half-glass of orange juice 'with bits' that went with it. We had proper coffee, with plenty of milk, and there was a small rib-eye steak that has been in the fridge too long and smelled rather ripe but which I felt I should eat for lunch. Once cooked the steak smelled and tasted fine, but when my stomach felt a little dodgy later I did wonder whether I had been wise to eat it. Dinner was butter chicken made with the leftovers of Sunday's 'real' dinner and a jar of Patak's delicious sauce (Indian cuisine, with its complex spicing, is one I have always preferred to leave to the experts), followed by a chocolate brownie with cream.

When I got up from my recliner at the end of the evening's TV my thighs and bum felt horribly stiff, and I thought tomorrow's walk might be a problem. However, they had eased a lot by the time I got into bed and quickly fell into a deep sleep.

### **Thursday 26 May 2016**

Pat and I were both awake at 5:30am, when I had needed a pee, and she suggested a cup of tea. I have been avoiding tea with milk before breakfast on fast days but I had some to make her feel better. My left shoulder had been quite uncomfortable for a while after my visit to the bathroom – just enough to make it difficult to settle – so I took two paracetamols while she was downstairs. The tea tasted wonderful, and I must have gone off into a deep sleep after it because I jolted awake, feeling very groggy, at exactly 6:40. I have no idea how I know when this target time is reached, but something somewhere in my brain manages it quite consistently. By the time I got downstairs I was feeling better and went through my usual morning routine.

My guts did feel a little unsettled – the steak? - but my visit to the loo was less productive than usual.

My legs felt better on this morning's drizzly walk, with my stride seeming longer than usual, but my intermediate times were incredibly close to yesterday's: exactly the same at the first gate and five seconds later at the second. However, I got home 21 seconds faster than yesterday. The dampness had softened the mud which the farmer's huge tractor tyres have deposited on the lane recently so I made a point of walking in the shallow fringes of the puddles on the way back. Unfortunately I forgot the pothole in the tarmac and stepped in one up to my right ankle, letting the water slosh into my trainer!

At 8:15 I felt a sudden need for a second visit to the loo, which proved much more productive than the earlier one. I think it probably had been a mistake to eat that steak yesterday! Things settled down after my yogurt-and-banana breakfast and even more after two strong black coffees.

Around 1pm I went up to the Co-op for some salad ingredients and then spent half an hour making up a salad bowl. Tonight's dinner is scheduled to be the usual fillet of smoked haddock, poached egg and spinach, but we thought cold flaked smoked haddock with a hard-boiled egg and salad might make an interesting alternative. In the course of checking the recipe I discovered that we should only have been eating one egg rather than two! I made a note of the calorie-content of 100 grams of each salad ingredient as I unpacked it, and was interested in the result: celery 10kcal,

Little Gem lettuce 15kcal, rocket 16kcal, green pepper 20kcal, watercress 24kcal, yellow pepper 30kcal, spinach 30kcal, spring onions 30kcal, red pepper 30kcal.

We went for the hard-boiled egg and salad option, which made a very pleasant change.

### **Friday 27 May 2016**

I came downstairs this morning half-excited and half-worried. After putting back on 7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds in the first two weeks after finishing the 8-week bloody-sugar diet, The 5:2 fasting 'maintenance diet' took off one pound in the first week and no less than *four* in the second. Today, at the end of the third week, I knew anything could happen. To my amazement, the word 'maintenance' was the key one. I weighed in at exactly the same weight as last week. The freaky four-pound loss had been sustained. Once again I was just 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds heavier than at the end of the 8-week diet. It would have been good to lose just a little weight, but staying put wasn't a bad alternative.

This morning's walk was quite acceptable, too, with the third fastest field-gate times of the week but the longest overall time.

Lunch for me was the last of the pork pie we bought on the 18 May, while Pat had some of the fresh quiche we bought today. We both also had some Camembert, very ripe and delicious, with me winning Pat's rind as she only eats the inside.

Dinner was scampi, chips and mushy peas from the local chippy followed by an Aldi 'De Luxe' choc-ice..

### **Monday 30 May 2016**

We spent Saturday with Alistair's gang in Buxton to celebrate Ewan's ninth birthday. We had a delightful time, but it was Pat who called a halt as her new back problems made it impossible to sit any longer.

Yesterday was mostly taken up with Andy Murray's match against 6-foot 10-inch John Isner (not as easy as 6-foot 11-inch Ivo Karlovic, but still a straight sets win) followed by Lewis Hamilton's much-overdue first win of the season in Monaco.

I got up for a pee this morning convinced that it was 5:45am and that I would be able to go back to bed for 55 minutes, only to discover that it was actually 6:45 – five minutes late! I felt very groggy, but by the time I had had some tea, done my exercises and had my usual visit to the bathroom I felt a lot better. The left foot was mildly painful for the whole of the walk, possibly from all the clutch work on Saturday's 100-mile Buxton round trip. My times were slower than any of last week's and more typical of the previous week's – 15 seconds early at the first gate, 30 early at the second and home in 40 minutes 19 seconds – but still within my targets.

Today is my mother's birthday. She would be 106 if she was still with us. It is also Spring Bank Holiday, so I hope Pat will postpone stripping our beds. She is in a very bad way with her spinal problems and very depressed because her MRI scan didn't show anything obvious and immediately treatable. She has a physiotherapy appointment, but not for over a month.

We visited Anton this morning, and he was in reasonably cheery form. On the way back we attempted to visit HomeBase, but as I had predicted, it being a Bank Holiday, thousands of other people had the same idea. Cars were queueing for a long way down the approach roads and hardly moving. I managed to bale out and promised to take Pat tomorrow when they would all be at work. On the way home we made a quick stop at Sainsbury's for essential fasting supplies, and were disappointed that they had none of our mainstay smoked haddock fillets – that's

Bank Holiday shopping for you! I will have to go back before Thursday as we only have one pack left.

It turned out that a visit to HomeBase would have been quite futile. Pat wants an arch for the opening in the wall behind the house because the cheap steel-tube one we have has rusted and broken. We can replace that at Wilko's for £5, but she doesn't want to do that. Pat was feeling really bad by the time we got back – not just her back-pain but generally under the weather, perhaps from too many painkillers – and decided to go to bed, which is a rare event indeed. I used the time to check the web and found that Wilko have a far bigger range than HomeBase, but the only one that will do the job is Wilko's five-quid one. It's that, or buy some treated wood and tailor-make one myself.

## Tuesday 31 May 2016

Today's walk was better than yesterday's, but still slower at the target gates than any of last week's, but only five seconds slower at both gates than I was last Thursday, which is hardly significant. I had to estimate the time at the first gate because I was so engrossed in chatting with the many blackbirds that I walked right past before I remembered to check the stopwatch!

Our bedroom blind was up as I approached home and there was evidence that Pat had been downstairs for a cup of tea, so I went up to tell her not – under *any* circumstances! - to strip our beds, and to report the results of yesterday's research. She took this news better than I expected and we discussed how we might make a replacement metal arch more attractive with climbing honeysuckle and roses.

Today is the first fasting day of week four. I had two cups of ordinary tea with milk before breakfast, which probably didn't even bring my breakfast calories (a 150-gram carton of Yeo Valley 0%-fat yogurt with a small banana) up to target, followed by a cup of black Earl Grey after breakfast and a black coffee at around 10:30am. I tried drinking out usual tea, Ringtons' Connoisseur, without milk in the afternoon and found it surprisingly pleasant, so I could have spared myself the expense of buying Earl Grey and Lapsang! Dinner was the usual smoked haddock, *one* poached egg (cooked a little longer to avoid leaving delicious yolk smeared on the plate) and 125 grams of spinach. My helping of haddock was augmented by half of Pat's, as her appetite wasn't very good. I probably didn't exceed the day's calorie target by much, if at all, as I'm sure we aren't eating the full ration every fasting day.

I found today less of a struggle than previous fasting days, so I guess I'm just getting used to the diet. I did drink more water, though, which Mosley says helps you to feel full.

## Wednesday 1 June 2016

Today's must have been the gloomiest first day of summer ever: very dull, cool, drizzly and windy.

I made an early start as we were expecting Aidan to drop Bailey the dog off for a week's lodging on his way to work, but it turned out that he had changed his mind and plans to bring him this evening. I was out by 7am and back at 7:45.

My gate times were exactly the same as Last Wednesday's and faster than both this week's, though it took me 40 minutes 36 seconds to get home, the longest since a week last Friday. The legs and ankles felt quite good, but the stiff and cold head-wind didn't help.

I did a quick run to Sainsbury's for smoked haddock (I got five packs) and various odds and ends of food, and then to Wilko where I got the £5 garden arch and a dust-sheet to protect the bedding in the guest room in case Bailey chose to sleep in there as he did when he stayed before.

Aidan delivered him at around 6pm and he settled in with no problems at all, once I had stopped him opening the front door and following Aidan to the car!

### **Thursday 2 June 2016**

Bailey was quiet through the night, making no attempt to get past the fire-guard we had set up as a gate at the bottom of the stairs. I woke up at around 5:30am and thought I could hear his almost ultrasonic whine, but he didn't fuss and I managed to get back to sleep for about an hour. The excitement when I got downstairs at 6:30 was something to behold. The phrase 'beside himself' doesn't do justice to his antics. He was ready at the back door when I got into the kitchen and when I opened the door he hurtled the length of the garden before stopping to pee.

Today is a fasting day, so I had a cup of black Earl Grey and then got sorted out with poo bags, doggy treats and leads so that I could take Bailey – or Bailey could take *me* – for a walk. I clipped his extending lead on and, with a little confusion, got him and myself out of the door and the door closed and locked.

We seemed to be making a pretty good pace, but this was more like resistance exercise than a brisk walk – with Bailey pulling and me resisting. I kept the lead on its shortest setting and kept jerking him back when he pulled too hard. Once we reached the lane I unlocked the lead and let him explore at will, but still discouraged excessive pulling. We turned back at the second field gate, so we covered my target distance. It was pointless trying to remember the intermediate times, but the walk, including poo bagging and disposal, took about five minutes longer than usual – 45 minutes 30 seconds. By the end I felt that I had had quite a good work-out, but Bailey, who must have covered twice the distance I had, was still full of energy and spent most of his time in the garden. He finally conked out on the bed behind my chair at around 8:15 as I was typing this.

I should be able to manage a walk like today's every day of his stay, including the weekend when I would normally be enjoying rest days.

I finally got round to calling Steve Baker, our tree man, and he agreed to come round this evening to advise and quote a price for tidying up the larger stuff in the front and back gardens. He is expected between 5 and 7pm, which could mean that our fasting-day dinner is quite late. By 5:30pm I was already beginning to feel hungry, having had nothing but black coffee and tea since about 8:30am.

I did a bit of work in the garden today myself, removing all the dead flower stems from our magnificent lavender bed, which is sprouting vigorously, and deadheading the big lilac which is still thriving on my mother's ashes, apart from the very highest flowers which I couldn't reach without breaking some of the branches. Bailey kindly kept me company – in other words, got in the way in every way possible! - and once I had finished he spent most of the rest of the afternoon asleep on the settee. My walk must have tired the poor lad out.

I have been quite harsh with myself on this eighth fast-day, even sticking to black tea after the usual smoked haddock, poached egg and spinach dinner. So I will have absorbed no calories between breakfast and dinner (9½ hours) and none between dinner and breakfast (14 hours). Having bought the Earl Grey and Lapsange teabags specifically for fast-days I discovered today that our regular Ringtons' Connoisseur tastes pretty good without milk.

### **Friday 3 June 2016**

I got up at 6:20 this morning, having heard a few gentle whimpers from downstairs. Bailey was insanely pleased to see me, running round me in circles before departing on a high-speed tour of the garden.

My weight this morning was 13 stone 1¼ pounds, half a pound less than for the last two weeks. I had been hoping to lose less, but the main thing is that I am eating fairly normally for five days a week and have at least lost *some* weight or held steady every week, losing five pounds since the horrible peak six weeks ago and two weeks after finishing the eight-week ordeal.

The second Bailey-walk was hard work. He was pulling almost all the time, though not too hard, and getting to the second field gate and back took us 47 minutes 52 seconds, more than two minutes longer than yesterday. By the time we got home my arms, shoulder, feet and legs were all protesting, so I think I have changed my mind about doing this with him every day, and will probably take him for a shorter walk on Saturday and Sunday, perhaps with a few ball games in the garden.

I'm glad to say that, as I type this, Bailey is totally crashed out on the bed behind me, so he obviously found the walk tiring, too!

I managed to get the old garden arch dismantled, in spite of the long string of LED lights and the dense growth of jasmine that were woven through it.

### **Monday 6 June 2016**

As predicted, Bailey had to make do without my usual walks over the weekend. In fact, he had to manage without *any* walks, as my legs and feet were feeling pretty battered. He was out in the garden for much of the weekend but he was still pretty hyperactive by yesterday evening. Happily I had recovered by this morning, and we did the normal route in 47 minutes 1 second – nearly a minute less than Friday's time. He pulled less than last week and I felt quite good when we got back.

The early part of this morning was occupied with a problem on the new TV. Some channels were behaving normally but many others came up with a 'No signal' warning. After climbing around the garage loft tracking cables (much to Bailey's disapproval – he stayed at the bottom of the ladder looking anxious until I got down), I was relieved to find that the sitting-room has its own aerial feed, with a separate cable for the kitchen. I remembered that the old DVD recorder was connected to the aerial, with a through-feed to the TV. It is some years since the recorder was used as anything other than a player, so I connected the aerial cable directly to the TV and retuned it. Happily, the problem went away. I get a real kick out of playing engineer and solving problems like that, so I ended the morning feeling thoroughly pleased with myself.

This afternoon I assembled and erected the Wilko garden arch – a fiddly job in very hot sunshine.

We decided not to have a proper cooked dinner, settling instead for some Indian and Chinese snacks from the freezer. They were frankly disappointing and I think we might bin the rest. It was lovely to eat outside as the worst of the heat subsided, though, with an excellent Aldi Pinot Grigio for me and the excellent Aldi equivalent to Pimms - Austin's – for Pat.

### **Tuesday 7 June 2016**

Bailey and I had another walk on my usual route this morning, this time getting round in 43 minutes 44 seconds, a major improvement on yesterday.

We had our usual fasting-day breakfast of yogurt and banana, but at coffee time I forgot the fasting and made a milky coffee for myself (Pat was out shopping with friend Sue). I had only taken a small sip when I remembered, but I had eaten one of our Belgian caramelised biscuits.

This probably wasn't surprising, as I had taken a huge builder's bag of garden refuse to the tip in the increasing heat. The bag was over-full but I managed to wrestle it into

and out of the car boot. I couldn't lift it onto the lip of the green-refuse skip, though, having instead to take out several armfuls by hand before I could lift the remainder.

Once I realised what I had done with the coffee I had 1½ cups black – and no more biscuits! The milky cup is in the fridge for tomorrow.

My next appointment at the Royal Derby is in two weeks. I am fairly confident that the left ankle will show a considerable improvement, as it is almost completely pain-free. I still get some soreness in the other joints of the foot, but nothing really in the ankle itself. My walking performance has been pretty consistent since the last review on the 14 March. I was still doing the 30-minute walk then, and for the ensuing two weeks, but have done the 40-minute programme since then.

The rest of the fast proceeded without mistakes, with various cups of tea and a nice mixed salad with a softish boiled egg and cold smoked haddock.

During the evening we became anxious about Bailey. He seemed quite unhappy and uncomfortable, with his tail down and not wanting to be touched very much. We settled him down, though, and he seemed okay, but sometime after midnight he started barking. I went downstairs first, and he was really weird, with a lot of hoarse, high-pitched whining and walking round in tight circles. Our best guess was heat-stroke, as the day had been very hot and his dense, dark-brown hair would absorb infra-red in huge quantities. It was still very warm, so we got him outside, but he would only hang around the back door. When I tried to bring him in he lay down outside the door and I had to manhandle him in. We opened the conservatory for him, with two large fanlights open, and he got into his own bed, which he has never used since he arrived. We put a water bowl in with him and went back to bed.

### **Wednesday 8 June 2016**

When I came down at 6:30am I was hugely relieved to find Bailey quite normal, if not quite as excited to see me as usual. I noticed that his tail was still not wagging at its usual perky angle, and that there seemed to be a sharper bend near the top. I wondered if he had strained it somehow. To my amazement, when I said the word 'walk' he became quite excited, so I decided to give it a try.

I did the first addition of water and flour to my bread sponge and then we set off, with Bailey so keen that I had trouble hooking his lead on.

Once we got out he was quite normal, and was even managing to get his tail up and wagging. He was his usual nosy, tuggy self, but I decided to shorten the walk for both our sakes as the temperature was already above 20°C. We turned back at the first field gate (my long-time 15-minute target) and completed the walk in just over 35 minutes.

I mixed and kneaded and proved my focaccia dough, and at midday the three loaves were sitting, glistening with olive oil, at the back of the hob with the oven on full. In between I helped Pat with a few odd jobs in the garden, including uprooting the roase from my late son Dave's garden in Exeter. I moved it a couple of years ago and it has not grown at all, so it is now in a large pot of Wickes's peat-free compost. This last task revealed that she has used three of the four bags I bought a few weeks ago. I need to go and get some more.

The three focaccias were baked at 2:30pm and by late afternoon had each been cut into eight portions which were bagged and frozen.

Bailey seemed fine all day, provided I didn't touch his tail. He is far better at harrassing gardeners than Monty Don's retriever Nigel! In the evening he was quite lethargic, just lying on the settee most of the time.



## Thursday 9 June 2016

As usual, my mysterious body/mind clock snapped me awake at exactly 6:40am. I dressed and put my teeth in, Bailey was waiting for me at the bottom of the stairs, with tail raised and wagging. A good sleep had obviously rested it. It wasn't the same for me: I felt really dopey when I got up.

I missed my exercises yesterday morning, but today I did the full ration before visiting the bathroom. Today is a fasting day so I had a cup of black Earl Grey. Bailey got more and more excited, so I assume that he wanted a walk. We did the shortened version again in 35½ minutes. Once back, he enjoyed a nice lie-down on the settee.

Fasting was not much of a struggle for me, even when I was cooking the smoked haddock and hard(ish) boiled egg in the middle of the afternoon. I did enjoy my dinner, though!

Aidan arrived before we ate, confirming that he still intended to separate permanently from Helen. To our surprise, she had asked him if he wanted to keep Bailey, and we agreed that this would not be a problem. So we look like being a family of four for a while!

## Friday 10 June 2016

I woke as usual this morning and Bailey reacted as usual too, in spite of having his 'Dad' here.

I weighed myself after ablutions at 13 stone and half a pound. This is only 1½ pounds heavier than my lowest after the eight-week diet, 6½ lower than the dreadful high after the Yorkshire trip and three-quarters of a pound lighter than last week. If I can lose that much each week I will match my all-time low in two weeks – and maybe carry on losing...?

Aidan got up shortly after me and we had a good chat before I asked the dog if he wanted a walk. He immediately became very excited, so we set out at a good pace. I decided to do the full lap to the second gate and back, and surprised myself by reaching the gate in 15 seconds under the 20-minute target. The whole walk took us only 40 minutes 30 seconds, which is about what I was doing before Bailey moved in.

Aidan volunteered to mow the lawn this morning before going down to Nottingham to collect another load of his stuff. Bailey was less bothered by his disappearance than he has been when Pat or I have gone out during the past week.

My legs and feet are feeling much better now, only bothering me when they stiffen up after prolonged sitting.

## Saturday 11 June 2016

We managed a lie-in this morning. Aidan had already taken Bailey for a walk when I got downstairs, so that was a bonus for the dog as I had not intended to walk him on my rest days. After yesterday's good performance, though, I think I can keep up my regular walks programme with Bailey included.

We had our first trip out of the house together this morning since Bailey arrived, because we have been reluctant to leave him alone in the house. We went to Aldi and Sainsbury's, and when we got home Aidan had gone out and Bailey was fine. So when Aidan is at work we will have no concerns about leaving the hound in charge.

I have been worrying about the gearchange on the car for some times as it has been very stiff and difficult to get into some gears. This morning it was particularly bad, but I discovered that it was fine if I pressed the clutch pedal right down to the floor. The conclusion is that my pride in my clutch-control with the fused ankle has been a little misguided: I simply haven't been getting the pedal down far enough, and there must

be some mechanism in the transmission that guards against changing gear without totally disengaging the clutch. That is a great relief, as I had been having visions of needing to change the car to avoid the high cost of a gearbox repair. It does confirm my belief that, when we do decide to change cars, we should go for an automatic.

### **Monday 13 June 2016**

Aidan cooked a meal for us last night, which made a pleasant change. He and I intended to stay up and watch the Canadian Grand Prix highlights last night, but were both dozing off soon after the start!

It was strange meeting someone during my rigid early-morning routine, but I wasn't disrupted at all and he was off to work before Bailey and I went out..

It rained fiercely during the night, so I decided to give my usual walk route a miss. We took a route I used to walk regularly with George, involving a lot of streets but also including a lap round the football pitch behind our houses. This took us a respectable 35 minutes, so I decided not to add a final loop to complete 40. Bailey had had two extra walks with Aidan over the weekend.

It looks as though our guests will be with us for some time, as Aidan plans to buy a house nearer his office in Hull – a process that will take several weeks at least.

We went over to Anton's this morning, leaving Bailey alone in the house for a couple of hours. When we got back, everything was absolutely fine. I was also delighted that, by ensuring that I got the clutch pedal down properly, there were no problems with changing gear. I can't believe I have been making this mistake without realising it for weeks, if not months!

### **Tuesday 14 June 2016**

Another very wet night made the lane rather uninviting this morning, so we carried on and tried a parallel one without tarmac. That was very puddly and muddy, so we withdrew and used the very-little-used road, where we could at least navigate between puddles. The total time for the walk was 43 minutes 30 seconds, which partly made up for yesterday's shortfall.

Today is yet another fasting day, so I drank black Earl Grey before and after the walk. I wonder if I will manage to shed another three-quarters of a pound this week. If I can keep that rate of weight-loss up by intermittent fasting, it will call into question the merits of the eight-week no-carb diet. However, this rate would only have taken off six pounds rather than the 28 I lost in the eight weeks.

I have more-or-less stopped recording the state of my ankles, which was the reason for starting this diary. This reflects the fact that they are both doing very well. One or other is often a little niggly while walking but really nothing worth commenting on.

Around lunchtime (which isn't on fast days because no lunch is allowed) I made up a bowl of mixed salad and then washed out the salad dressing bottle and mixed a new batch of vinaigrette. This went down really well at dinner-time with cold smoked haddock and a semi-hard boiled egg.

### **Wednesday 15 June 2016**

After a very wet start, it was still raining moderately heavily when walk-time arrived, so I decided to take the old route as on Monday, without the lap round the football pitch. Bailey and I were both dripping wet by the time we completed the circuit in around 30 minutes (I hadn't bothered to set the stopwatch) and needed a good rubdown with a towel.

The rain continued on and off for most of the day, so not much was achieved.

## **Thursday 16 June 2016**

The smoke alarm over our stairs has been beeping for a couple of nights, indicating a flat battery. This morning I remembered to take it down and check that it was the source of the noise as we also have a CO alarm over the stairs, installed with the woodburner. The smoke alarm beeped in the kitchen.

It had rained quite heavily in the night, so I wasn't sure where to walk this morning. It was dry outside, so I decided to have a look at my lane-and-gates route, expecting the puddles to be too deep for comfort. To my surprise most of the water had soaked away, so Bailey and I set off down the lane. With all the doubt, I had forgotten to change watches, so I just noticed that we had left at roughly 7:10am. The gate times were acceptable, and we got round in 43 minutes with my feet aching from resisting Bailey's tugging.

The first job when I got back was to look for a battery, so I had a dig in my battery box and found one PP3 which tested OK in the alarm. I went straight to Amazon and found a pack of five Duracell Industrial PP3s for £4.83 with free delivery – a great deal which I ordered at once. These should last me several years.

Today is this week's second fast day, so I had two cups of black tea before breakfast.

I had a new experience today. I bought the wrong VAX cordless vacuum-cleaner from Amazon yesterday, so today I returned it simply by printing off two labels and taking the parcel to the local Co-op. Amazing technology! I just hope I have ordered the right one today!

## **Friday 17 June 2016**

Another excellent weigh-in this morning: 12 (not 13!) stone 13½ pounds – a full pound lower than last Friday, only a pound higher than the low at the end of the eight-week diet and – most significantly, 7¼ pounds lower than the dreadful high I scored after the North Yorkshire trip. If this continues I will soon be into uncharted territory!

This morning was dry and mild and the lane was more-or-less dry, so we did my 'usual' route. Delayed by avoiding some dogs, stopping to greet others and poo-bagging, we did the full circuit in 43½ minutes – half a minute longer than yesterday. I was quite hot and sweaty when we got back, with aching legs and feet. Bailey really is hard work!

## **Monday 20 June 2016**

After a restless night, and not wanting to over-stress the legs and feet before my hospital appointment, I decided to do the shorter walk with Bailey this morning, turning back at the first gate and completing the walk in just over 31 minutes. The legs and feet had felt strong yesterday when going for the papers and felt good this morning.

I wasn't looking forward to what I felt was an unnecessary trip to the Royal Derby, so I decided to excuse Pat from accompanying me to my ankle review and did it solo, through horrible rain and spray on the way down and beautiful sunshine on the way home, which encouraged me to give the Focus its head, a real pleasure now that the eternal roadworks on the M1 have finally gone, leaving two pristine four-lane carriageways. I was home shortly after 4pm, fairly satisfied: the pain-free left (fused) ankle just needs keeping an eye on as the joint between the tibia and the talus is still a visible line on the x-rays. The crazy right ankle, with the totally collapsed replacement joint, is being left as – amazingly – it is causing me no grief whatever. I go back in two months.

## **Tuesday 21 June 2016**

Sunday night's restlessness caught up with me this morning: when I woke and checked the time it was 7:20am – 40 minutes later than usual!

I passed on the neck and shoulder routine and was out with Bailey just after 7:50. It was an unusually warm morning, and I worked up quite a sweat. After yesterday's positive outcomes, I was concerned when, with about ten minutes to go to the finish, I got a really sharp stabbing pain in the outside corner of my left heel. However, this passed completely after two or three minutes.

With doggy-poo collecting and a short loop back because I had forgotten to pick up the bag I had left at the side of the lane, the walk took just 45 minutes – a decent workout after so long in the car yesterday.

Today is a fast day, so by 10am I had had just black tea to drink.

I got sick of waiting for amazon to deliver our lightweight cordless vacuum cleaner and found that I could get it for the same price at Argos. I ordered it online for immediate collection at our local store and cancelled the Amazon order. I collected it early in the afternoon, got it charged and tested it before dinner. It looks really promising.

Later on, I put the LED lights back on the arch, but by bedtime there was no sign of them lighting.

## **Wednesday 22 June 2016**

I was awake early this morning, but very comfortable and able to half-doze until 6:40am. When I got up my left shoulder was very painful, but after the full exercise routine (and a cup of tea with milk!) it felt much better.

I forgot the stopwatch again today but was able to remember that we had set out at exactly 7:15. We reached the two target gates in exactly 15 and 20 minutes and completed the walk in 40 minutes.

I spent quite a lot of time cutting back the clematis on the pergola during the morning, and just before lunch I managed to get a very full bag of trimmings into the car and down to the tip. Once again I had to unload quite a lot of the refuse by hand before I could lift the bag over the side of the skip and tip it out. My shoulders were very sore after all this exertion.

Pat had been working hard in the garden too, so we agreed that we would have a lazy afternoon.

## **Thursday 23 June 2016**

I was too comfortable early this morning even to stir enough to check the time. Lying on my left side (on the sore shoulder) was fine, as was lying on my front. Eventually I reached for my watch, which read 6am. As usual, some mysterious function prompted me to check again just before 6:40. I did my toe and ankle exercises and got up straight away.

Today is the second of this week's fast days, so I had a cup of Lapsang without milk.

The walk – the first without either a jacket or a sweatshirt – went very well indeed, so I must be getting the knack of walking with the dog. I actually remembered to put the stopwatch on and therefore knew that we passed the first gate in 14 minutes 40 seconds and the second in 19 minutes 20 seconds. I didn't bother to go into the field to complete the 20-minute out lap and we reached home in 39 minutes 11 seconds, increasing the total gain to 54 seconds.

## Monday 27 June 2016

There was nothing much to record over the weekend. We went to Buxton on Saturday and Aidan brought Barney over on Sunday, so two nice family days for us. Aidan and I were finally able to make time to install three new fence panels in the garden. We made a monster lasagne for yesterday, which went down very well with everyone – even Pat!

I didn't record details of Friday's walk on the spreadsheet and I didn't update this diary for Friday either, so I have logged three target times which, as far as I can recall, are not too wide of the mark.

This morning, we were 15 seconds late at the first gate thanks to a Bailey poo-bagging break but 15 seconds early at the second gate. We finished the walk in 39 minutes 32 seconds.

This afternoon, after watching our sacrificial lamb James Ward slaughtered by Djokovic, I cleared up the rubbish left over from yesterday's fence-repair activities.

## Tuesday 28 June 2016

This morning's walk was a little slower than yesterday's. Completed in 40 minutes 23 seconds. Both feet were rather painful – perhaps punishment for the garden tasks on Sunday.

Pat was out with 'the girls', so I took the opportunity to watch a movie – *The Martian* (pretty good) – on Amazon. During this I made coffee and only remembered too late that it was a fast day. By then I had had a milky coffee instead of black and one Belgian biscuit, probably distracted by ensuring that the dog got his biscuit ration! That meant I would have to forego the hard-boiled egg with dinner tonight. An unwanted injection of calories in the morning but a net total less than usual for the day. (Pat was let off the fasting because of her social commitment.) After eating my haddock warm with quite a pile of salad I decided the diet could afford a little milk in my two evening cups of tea.

## Wednesday 29 June 2016

I have been quite concerned lately about my level of fatigue during the day and the evening. I have tiny momentary dips into what I assume to be dreams, returning to what I am watching or listening to with the impression that my 'micro-dream' was relevant and then realising that it definitely wasn't. I also fall asleep for longer periods, sometimes only realising this when I have totally lost track of what was on the TV or the radio. Even when this is not happening, I feel very tired during the afternoons.

I have been wondering whether I might be overdoing the mixture of diet and exercise, so this morning I decided to cut my morning walk from 40 to 30 minutes – still the popular recommendation as a healthy level of exercise.

Another reason for easing off is a strange burning sensation at the bottom of my right shin. There is no sign of anything on the skin, so I wonder if it may be coming from inside. I rubbed in some hydrocortisone cream this morning and it seemed to ease the sensation. It may also be about the wonderful support socks I bought in April...?

Later in the day my whole right foot was aching quite badly, so I took two paracetamol and put the splint on for the first time in many months. The outside 'ankle bone' – the lump of bone on the outside of the joint – was very prominent and tender, and eventually I decided that the splint was pressing or rubbing on it. After dinner I took the splint off and took two more paracetamols. Between the two the pain eased somewhat, but I doubt if I will be walking tomorrow morning. I warned Aidan about this and he said he would walk Bailey tomorrow.

## Thursday 30 June 2016

I heard Aidan up and about very early – obviously to fit Bailey's walk in before going to work – so I added the 40 minutes walking time to my normal rising time and got up at 7:20am.

The right ankle, which I had protected with a white ProSport fabric support all night, felt much more comfortable, though tender to the touch, and I was walking normally. I decided to put this back over my support sock for the day.

My daughter Sarah and her husband – the improbably-named David Cameron! - are coming up for an overnight on Saturday, so we had to go shopping today for food, beer and wine. I felt I could cope with this OK, and was proved right: I managed Aldi, the Welbeck Farm Shop and Sainsbury's with no difficulty. So it seems that the flare-up of the ankle was just a short-term thing, probably caused by Bailey's antics.

Today was the second fasting day of this week, and I stuck scrupulously to the rules except for substituting a portion of white bean mash for the egg and spinach with my smoked haddock. Pat had decided to have this with griddled chicken breast (a recipe from the eight-week diet) as she has become bored with the haddock dinner.

## Friday 1 July 2016

Aidan had agreed to walk Bailey this morning, so I stayed in bed until just before 7am and came downstairs just as he was leaving for work, in time for the fascinating BBC news. The referendum and Labour leadership sagas got crazier and crazier.

After my rather constipated ablutions (not what I had expected after half a can of cannellini beans!), I weighed in at 12 stone 11¼ pounds – a pound and a quarter loss for the week. I am now a pound and three-quarters lighter than I was at the end of the eight-week diet, which is amazing, and my total weight-loss since starting to diet is 30 pounds. Looking at my spreadsheet, it is noticeable that the rate of loss is much steadier than it was on the eight-week programme, with no spikes at all. That may be because I was logging my weight daily during the eight weeks and am only weighing once a week now. I have lost some weight every week but one since starting the 5:2 diet, and am finding the fasting quite easy. Unfortunately Pat struggles, needing milk in her tea and coffee to make the diet bearable.

The right ankle, ugly and deformed as it is, is back to working normally, so I hope to restart my walks on Monday.

## Monday 4 July 2016

Today started with lovely sunshine and a temperature in the mid-teens. Aidan hadn't walked Bailey before I got downstairs so I decided to give it a try. We did the short route to the first gate and back. I remembered to change watches, but by the time I had got Bailey's lead on, got outside and locked the door I forgot to start the stopwatch. Oddly, the right ankle felt fine but there was some dull pain from the left foot. Nothing serious, though. The total time was about 33 minutes.

My idea that reducing my walking time might help with my chronic fatigue was thrown into question after dinner. I decided to take my Kindle to bed when *The Great British Sewing Bee* came on at 9:30pm, but only read for a very short time before falling asleep.

## Tuesday 5 July 2016

Apart from a trip to the loo sometime before 1am, I slept through until exactly 6 o'clock, when I got up for my second pee, and then had a really comfortable spell of catnapping until 6:35, when I got up. The walk was uneventful, reaching the first gate in about 15¼ minutes and taking 30 minutes 55 seconds in total. I was spared poo-

bag duty when Bailey decided to use a dense clump of nettles as his toilet – no way I was delving into that! By the end of the walk both feet were aching a little, but nothing to worry about.

I had quite a busy early morning, emptying the dishwasher and then boxing up the leftovers from Sunday's Greek-style slow-roasted lamb shoulder, which I had converted into a serious main-course soup for last night's dinner. It filled five takeaway boxes, which are now nestling in the garage chest freezer.

Today is a fasting day so I had 0%-fat yogurt and a small banana for breakfast. Pat really hates the super-sour yogurt and wasn't at all impressed with the Icelandic Skyr I found in Asda. She was much *more* impressed when we found out that a standard 40-gram portion of porridge with a level teaspoon of sugar had the right calorie count for a fasting breakfast.

I had a busy later morning, too. I deadheaded and cut back the climbing hydrangea to give us more space on the patio and then had a fairly aggressive trim on the Clematis Montana. I then cleared up various trugs and piles of Pat's garden refuse and washed the four white plastic patio chairs. I now have a builder's bag just light enough for me to handle and ready for the tip again.

### **Wednesday 6 July 2016**

The neck and shoulders (which I haven't been exercising for a few days) gave me a really comfortable hour's relaxation before I got up at 6:35 this morning. A cup of tea with milk was a welcome treat after yesterday's fasting.

However, my gardening-weary legs and feet, fractious encounters with two other dogs and a poo-bag slowed us down on the walk, which clocked a slow 33 minutes 18 seconds. The walk was pleasant, though, on a fresh but bright morning at about 12°C, and my normal breakfast of muesli, prunes and yogurt with orange juice was another welcome experience.

After breakfast, I got the bottles bagged and the garden-refuse bag ready, opened up the back of the car for cargo carrying and went off to the tip. The bag was much lighter than other recent ones, though just as bulky. My body coped pretty well, including doing many deep bends to get bottles out of the bags.

There were other odd jobs to do and then we could settle down to watch the tennis. Among others I investigated periwinkles, a superb ground-cover plant with lots of pretty little blue flowers, which are growing in two beds in our back garden. These would be ideal to weed-proof the front garden, with shrubs growing up through them. I found a small and rather miserable specimen on the edge of one of the bug plants, so I dug it up and potted it in fresh compost. We need to go to the garden centre, so we will look out for periwinkles when we do.

First, an astonishing five-setter between Roger Federer and Marin Cilic – a spectacular feat of brinkmanship by Roger, who somehow emerged triumphant. This may not be great news for us Murray fans, but the guy is simply awesome. Dinner was linguine with fresh tomatoes, mozzarella and basil, cooked for once by Pat, and then there was the recorded Murray/Tsonga match to enjoy.

### **Thursday 7 July 2016**

My feet were aching this morning after two fairly active days, and during the walk to top of my left foot – *not* the ankle – was quite sore. I was very aware of the stresses on my feet as Bailey pulled me along. I have found that, if I keep my lead arm well back so that he is alongside me rather than in front, he doesn't pull so much. I need to work on this with him.

We got to the first gate in 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> minutes and completed the walk in 30 minutes 48 seconds.

I spent some time before breakfast trying to figure out a different menu for our fasting days.

Pat had discovered that a normal portion of porridge made from 40 grams of oats was an acceptable fast-day breakfast, and I had worked out that a little milk and sugar could be added. So the recipe became 40grams of Scotts Old-Fashioned Porridge Oats (237kcal), 1 teaspoon of sugar (20 kcal) and one tablespoon of semi-skimmed milk (15 kcal) – a total calorie count of 272.

The Mosley book has a recipe for a breakfast frittata (Spanish omelette) with a calorie count of 270. Adding this to the porridge as dinner gives a total daily intake of 542 kcal – 42 above the woman's 500 allowance but 48 less than the man's 600. So we made a double portion and split it with a slight bias in my favour. The doubled ingredient list looked like this: 150g onion (54 kcal) fried in 2 teaspoon of olive oil (80 kcal), 40g mushrooms (6 kcal), 60g spinach (16 kcal), 4 eggs (340 kcal). I added a little garlic and some oregano without affecting the total calories significantly! The result was tasty and satisfying, and made a great change from the haddock and chicken dishes.

### **Friday 8 July 2016**

It had been raining heavily before I got up, but had stopped by the time I got downstairs. For once, Aidan wasn't up earlier than me, which was enough to throw me slightly out of kilter. After my ablutions, I forgot to weigh myself before drinking a mug of tea and didn't change to the stopwatch.

Bailey and I took the quiet country road rather than the lane, which was flooded right across, did roughly 15 minutes out and were home in 30. My legs and feet felt better than they have through the week.

I weighed as soon as I got in and double-checked. The two readings were half a pound apart, but when I did two more I got 12 stone 13 pounds both times. Taking eight ounces off for the tea, I decided to log 12 stone 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> for the week – higher than last week and the same as the previous one, which is disappointing, but still lower than the figure at the end of the 8-week diet. As far as I know, I didn't cheat at all on either of this week's fasting days, and I have done more walking than in either of the last few weeks, so I have no idea where the extra came from. Fluid retention?

Just to get back to the main reason for writing this, both ankles are behaving pretty well at the moment. Odd twinges now and again but basically I can do pretty well anything I need to do on my feet. The right knee is gradually improving, but I still need to pull my weight forward with a hand when climbing stairs and support it with at least one hand when going down – I'm not clear how much this is a matter of confidence or an actual weakness in the knee. The important thing is that in spite of all the surgery I am living a pretty normal life.

### **Monday 11 July 2016**

We had a thrilling weekend of sport, with Serena winning the Wimbledon ladies' singles on Saturday, Andy winning the men's (accompanied by a nice afternoon tea and a glass or two of fizz) and Lewis winning the British Grand Prix. I'm no football fan but I watched the tail-end of the Euro 2016 final, lost interest with no score at full time and went to bed.

After a sweaty night, I didn't feel exactly fresh when I got up at 6:35am, but once out of the house I was pleased to find myself walking briskly with Bailey. We got about 50 metres past the first gate in 15 minutes and completed the walk in 30 minutes 40 seconds.



Apart from mowing the lawn and a little more pruning in the garden, there is nothing much else to report. Fasting tomorrow...

## **Tuesday 12 July 2016**

I had a good night's sleep apart from being wakened by a severe stomach ache in the small hours. I drank quite a lot of water and it eased, allowing me to get off to sleep. I cannot recall being awake much before 6:15am, but I got up at 6:35 as usual.

After a cup of black Earl Grey tea and more intriguing political stuff on the 7 o'clock news we got off for our walk. Talking of politics, it must be a coincidence that, after I sent the email below to the Victoria Derbyshire programme and Theresa May's .parliament.uk address, the appalling and ridiculous Andrea Loathsome pulled out of the Tory leadership contest. I'd love to think it wasn't though!

*'Why, as reported in yesterday's Observer, in 2008 (two years before becoming an MP) did Andrea Leadsom attend two conferences organised by the American Exchange Council, an extreme right-wing lobby group that denies climate-change science and promotes gun ownership? And why would the Council believe it was in its interests to spend £1800 flying Leadsom to the USA for these events? Does this country need a Prime Minister who keeps such bizarre company?'*

The first clear statements by Theresa May suggest a considerable shift to the left from Cameron's positions on various issues, so we can be grateful that she, and not the abominable Andrea, will be leading our new government.

Next exciting story? The Labour leadership challenge by Angela Eagle. I would love to see Dan Jarvis, MP for our near neighbours in Barnsley, throw his hat into the ring.

The walk was a little slower than yesterday's, with strange behaviour by Bailey, barking at two nice people who wanted to stroke him, and a poo that needed bagging. We reached the first gate in 15 minutes 45 seconds and completed the walk in 30 minutes 56 seconds.

Later on I pumped up my pressure sprayer and systematically zapped every visible weed in the front garden with RoundUp. Then the sprayer broke!

## **Wednesday 13 July 2016**

After a nice long half-awake lie-in, I got up at 6:30am, ready for a proper cup of tea – with milk.

Our walk was a little slower overall than yesterday's: we reached the first gate in 15 minutes 40 seconds (five seconds faster) and completed the route in 31 minutes 20 seconds (24 seconds slower). The second cup of tea tasted even better than the first.

We went into town fairly soon after breakfast to buy cards and gift wrap for daughter-in-law Susan's and granddaughter Anastasia's birthdays. We also visited Darren the fishmonger and bought salmon, crevettes and a dressed crab. The salmon was put aside for two dinners and I cooked the crevettes and crab in a stir-fry with noodles. It is really good to be able to walk the length of the town centre effortlessly and painlessly.

## **Thursday 14 July 2016**

This morning's walk, in glorious sunshine, was very slow – 17½ minutes to the first gate and completed in 33 minutes 10 seconds. This was due partly to my feeling a little footsore, partly because I had to take avoiding action to keep Bailey away from other dogs and partly because of two poo-bagging duties.

Fasting breakfast was a portion of porridge with a scant teaspoon of sugar and a drizzle of semi-skimmed.

Around what ought to have been lunchtime, Pat asked me if I could clean out the bottom of the unit in which I installed the very useful pull-out and for which I built a full-height, 200mm wide overgrown spice rack. The stuff that had fallen through the wire trays over the past ten years or so had glued itself to the greasy floor of the unit. I could only pull out the pull-out and work underneath the front and over the back of the bottom tray, using a powerful spray cleaner, a foam-backed Scotchbrite scourer and an ancient and easily dispensible J-cloth. Not a pleasant job, but I managed it – once I had sorted through the many shelves of foodstuffs, thrown away quite a lot and rearranged the rest. Hard on the knees and most of other joints in my 7 arms, legs, shoulders and back, but well worth the effort. And it passed some of the long, slow-moving time between breakfast and dinner – which will be griddled chicken breast with cannellini bean mash (again!).

Around 3pm I remembered that I needed to get some of the blanket weed out of the pond. I took the gardener's kneeler and my elbow-length Marigold industrial gloves down and dragged out a huge bundle of the dread weed plus a lot of the cultivated Canadian pondweed and quite a bit of duckweed out and dropped it into one of the composters.

### **Friday 15 July 2016**

This morning's weekly weigh-in was another disappointment: 12 stone 12¾ pounds, a quarter of a pound heavier than last week and a pound and a half heavier than the week before. That was my all-time low, so I suppose this isn't too bad!

I decided to do the 40-minute walk this morning (which was mild but dull), arriving slightly late at the first gate, a bit early at the second, and back home in 39 minutes 46 seconds.

Our broadband connection was down when we got back, and just as I was preparing to phone PlusNet after breakfast it came back on again. We had more-or-less got over our anxiety when it went off again. It is amazing how dependant we have become on Internet connectivity! It seemed to have stabilised by lunchtime but when I did a speed check the download speed was less than half its usual level.

My stepdaughter-in-law Sue will be visiting tomorrow with daughters Anastasia and Josie. Steve will be otherwise engaged with 'some guitar thing'. We have 21<sup>st</sup> birthday stuff for Anastasia and a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday present for Sue. We will be doing mid-afternoon snacks, so I needed to go shopping before lunch – a quick visit to our new local butcher and then a lap round Sainsbury's with a diesel fill-up on the way in.

### **Monday 18 July 2016**

We had a lovely time with Sue, Anastasia and Josie on Saturday afternoon, and later had another nice surprise: Alistair and Julie had decided to visit us on Sunday to see if Ewan, who had become quite phobic about almost all dogs, would make friends with Bailey. To everyone's delight, after hiding up the stairs from the dog for quite a lot of the afternoon, he and Tom ended up playing with him in the garden.

A thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile day.

This morning my legs and feet felt a bit worn after being on them doing shopping, prep and entertaining for most of the weekend. Both knees and both feet were mildly painful when we set out for our walk, but they eased a bit and coped fairly well. Thanks to that, a poo-bag duty and getting past a strange elderly lady who was blocking the pavement at the bus stop, out times were pretty poor – about 16¼ minutes to the first gate and 31 minutes 57 seconds for the full circuit.

Today developed into the hottest we have had this year, with the shade temperature at around 27°C here. Steve Wright was reading out temperatures from all over the world on his Radio 2 show, and most of them were about the same as ours, with only Abu Dhabi standing out at a horrific 44 degrees.

The most entertaining part of the day was watering all our containered plants with the hose. Bailey goes absolutely insane when there is water about, and a powerful jet from the hose is his ultimate toy. By the time we were finished he was absolutely drenched, and I was pretty wet too.

### **Tuesday 19 July 2016**

Today we are promised – or perhaps threatened with – a peak temperature of 31 degrees and a night-time maximum of 20. Last night we both slept with no covers over us at all.

This morning's walk was fairly slow, with the first gate reached in 15 minutes and 45 seconds and the circuit completed in 32 minutes 27 seconds. Even Bailey had slowed down and stopped pulling by the time we were in sight of home.

After breakfast – porridge of all things as today is a fasting day – I changed into shorts, sandals and a very big, loose, lightweight T-shirt. As I type this (at just after 9am) the sweat is rolling off me after doing nothing more energetic than watering the plants at the front of the house, which I forgot last night.

While I was upstairs I got the tabletop electric fan out and set it up to try and maintain a through draft (or should that be 'draught'?) in the bedroom, which is just under the uninsulated roof on which the sun will be beating down all day. Then I dug in the loft for the 4.5-tog summer duvet and removed the 9-tog spring-and-autumn one from the cover, bagged that and put it in the loft. As previously agreed with Pat, I put the empty cover back on the bed and left the thin quilt folded on the blanket box at the foot of the bed, ready to be pulled up if the nights turn cooler. By the time I had finished all that I was literally dripping sweat.

With the temperature so high, it would have been foolish to embark on anything energetic, so we spent much of the morning and early afternoon sitting outside in the shade and reading. I took the digital kitchen thermometer and put the probe on the table in the shade of the big umbrella. Around 1pm (midday Greenwich Mean Time) the reading settled around 31 degrees and even briefly hit 32. There was a gentle breeze – a warm one – which kept the temperature fluctuating a little, but by 2:30pm it seemed to have settled at an amazing 33 degrees, plus or minus a few tenths. At 3:15 the thermometer – which is a professional grade chef's instrument – briefly showed 35 degrees, which is a very high temperature indeed for this country, and by 4:15 it was showing 36 degrees!.

### **Thursday 21 July 2016**

Yesterday's and today's walks were even slower than Tuesday's, with today's taking 35 minutes 34 seconds. This was due partly to heat fatigue from two long, hot days and nights, partly to Bailey's bowels misbehaving and partly to my having done some fairly crazy stuff yesterday. First, I planted out some foxglove seedlings in the front garden, which was not in itself energetic, but with the temperature in the high twenties was still pretty tiring. Second, I went to Wickes and bought four incredibly heavy bags of potting compost, which had to be trolleyed from the car to the back garden – not very clever in such heat. Third, I drank rather a lot of Aidan's latest bottle of rum – a very nice dark Bacardi.

Today started quite warm, but the maximum temperature forecast for us was 22 degrees, which is reasonable for the time of year. Yesterday afternoon we got a

tantalising few large raindrops and some rumbles of distant thunder, but nothing useful, so Bailey and I had to water all the pots again in the evening.

Today is the second fasting day of week eleven. For breakfast we had a standard portion of porridge (40 grams of oats) each with a small sprinkle of sugar and a drop of milk, which is quite satiating. We decided to have a mushroom frittata with some green salad for dinner.

We needed various bits from Aldi (including red wine and ironing water!), so to break the day up we went there at around 2pm.

### **Friday 22 July 2016**

After my ablutions and before my cup of tea (with milk!) I weighed myself at a depressing thirteen stone and three-quarters of a pound – two pounds heavier than last week and three-and-a-half heavier than might lightest three weeks ago. So the fasting diet worked well to get me below the low from the end of the eight-week diet, after the huge spike that followed when that diet stopped, but now it is failing even to keep my weight stable. I really am sticking very rigidly to the 5:2 régime, so the problem must be with what I am eating on my non-fasting days.

This morning was dull and quite fresh after the past few days. I felt that I was walking better as soon as we set out, reached the first field gate in 14 minutes 45 seconds and was home again in 29 minutes 40 seconds.

It got quite hot through the morning, though the sun didn't break through until after lunch when it was really fierce. I sat and read outside and became very sleepy indeed.

### **Monday 25 July 2016**

It was around 5:30am when I got up for a pee, and I didn't get back to sleep after that. My guts were feeling a bit distended and painful. I had eaten a fairly greedy portion of the minced beef and onion pie Pat had cooked for last night's dinner, so I wasn't surprised to have a bit of indigestion.

I got up, as usual for me on a weekday, at 6:35, and by the time I got downstairs I was in urgent need of the loo. I felt better after this

Bailey and I had a good walk on this fresh, sunny morning, reaching the first gate in 14 minutes 45 seconds and home in 30 minutes 23 seconds. I sat outside with my tea and *The Observer* on my Kindle, but by around 8:15 the sky had clouded over and it felt too chilly for short sleeves. I was also feeling a bit of intestinal discomfort again, and had an unusual (for me) second trip to the loo.

I had a lazy morning watching three episodes of *Game of Thrones* while Pat was at Anton's.

Rather late in the day I remembered that I hadn't changed out bedding, so I did this and treated myself to a shower and a shave while I was upstairs.

Later, I had a go at the hot tap in the kitchen, which has been misbehaving for a while, but decided to wait until Aidan was home before dismantling it. Together we took it apart, found nothing amiss and reassembled it. Something must have shifted because the water flow was back to how it should be.

### **Tuesday 26 July 2016**

I was even more comfortable than usual in bed this morning, and I really didn't want to get up. However, I stuck to my personal rule-book and got out of bed at exactly 6:35am.

I remembered that today is a fasting day and drank black tea this time! I decided to go back to my 0% yogurt and banana breakfast and chicken breast with white bean mash for dinner after two weeks of weight gain. Unfortunately – or maybe fortunately – I discovered that the carton of 0%-fat Yeo Valley yogurt in the fridge was over two weeks out of date. I calculated that 110 grams of full-fat (which I eat for breakfast every weekday) would have the same number of calories as 150 grams of fat-free - and would be a hell of a lot nicer!

The walk was a bit of a strain because Bailey was as high as a kite. The times were bad because I had to divert to the post-box and our usual crossing of the road was delayed by a bus at the stop. We took 16 minutes 40 seconds to get to the first gate and a miserable 32 minutes 3 seconds to complete the walk.

During the morning I went shopping. Of all things, we had been having trouble finding what used to be called Wright's Coal Tar Soap but is now described as having a coal tar fragrance. I still love anything that smells disinfectant, like Vosene shampoo. I found that at the local pharmacy. I visited the Co-op for the rest of what we needed.

Later, after we would have had lunch if we had not been fasting, I planted out a few things in the front garden – mainly ground-cover perennials to smother the weeds (we hope). Then I got deeply embroiled in sorting out the accounts for the next couple of months, hoping the money might be a little more under control soon. What with an expensive car service, a new freezer, a new washing machine and the neat little Vax cordless vacuum cleaner, we seemed to have been piling up monster credit-card bills every month.

Dinner was, as planned, a griddled chicken breast and white bean mash, made from a tin of cennelliini beans with onions and garlic – very tasty and satisfying.

Because my frozen stash of home-made bread was running low, I had been bringing on my sourdough culture for several days, and before dinner I fed it. Then, at bedtime, I mixed 300 grams each of water, sourdough and the amazing Allinsons Very Strong White Bread Flour, which I have been using for a long time, to make a sponge which would ferment overnight.

My bedtime drink was just water, so I had had no calories apart from my breakfast and dinner.

### **Wednesday 27 July 2016**

I woke up slowly this morning and went to the loo at around 5:30am, seeing lots of raindrops on the en-suite window. When, after a wonderfully comfortable and restful hour, I went to pee again and get my denture, the rain was pattering on the glass and running down it. That made the morning's walk look rather unattractive!

Aidan had a meeting in London at 10:30. I hadn't heard him on the move, so he must have left very early indeed.

This must have disrupted Bailey's routine, because there was no sign of him when I got downstairs – let alone his usual fuss. I looked in Aidan's room and he was laid out on the bed, looking a bit disgruntled. However, he perked up when I got into my morning routine and did his usual deranged stuff when I collected his lead.

Before we left, I stirred 300 grams each of water and flour into my sponge.

The rain had stopped a long while before we set out, but it started again – only gently – just as we left. However it soon stopped. I considered a couple of alternative routes but decided to have a look at the lane, where I was surprised to see almost no standing water. The normal walk, then. We reached the first gate in 15½ minutes and finished the walk in 31 minutes exactly.

As soon as I had had a second cuppa I finished mixing my dough and left it to rest for half an hour before deciding whether it needed a little more flour to make it manageable. Actually it rested for quite a while longer than that because of other morning stuff we needed to do, and on the first round of kneading I was very unsure of whether I needed the extra flour. Then I remembered that I had added 50 grams extra to the last batch and that it hadn't risen as well as previous ones, so I decided to put up with the sticky dough and went through the cycle of 20-turn scraper-kneads and 10-minute rests, followed by one more knead and a one-hour rest to prove the dough (all this will be clear to anyone who has read the most recent parts of the long sourdough saga in my [Online Cookbook](#)). The dough was beautifully soft and elastic, and should be quite manageable with the aid of some olive-oil lubrication. By midday it had been shared out between three baking sheets and stretched to fill them – nearly. The dough has an irritating habit of springing back from wherever you push it! However, by 1pm, gravity and rising had done some of the work and the dough had relaxed enough for me to get it into almost all the corners of the baking sheets. As long as the tops of the focaccias remained coated with olive oil I didn't bother to cover them, leaving them in the sun to rise.

Before that, during the 60-minute proving time, I certified a passport photograph for our friends John and Sue's daughter Victoria – not easy as the paper from the photo-booth had very little affinity with ballpoint ink!

The three focaccias were baked and cooling by 3pm and by 4:30 each had been cut into eight portions which were bagged and in the freezer. I eat one of these portions almost every day for lunch, defrosting it in the toaster to make the crust really crunchy, rather than leathery as it is when defrosted in the microwave.

I slotted another job into this afternoon, making over a kilo of creamy, buttery mashed potato to go with Pat's rendering of a Mary Berry beef casserole.

All of which has nothing to do with the saga of my ankles, which is what this diary is supposed to be about, except that it shows that I can manage most things more-or-less as well as I did before the ankles gave out.

### **Thursday 28 July 2016**

This morning was strange.

I got up to the loo at around 4am but didn't do my usual trick of dropping straight off afterwards. I was restless for quite a long time (possibly the after-effects of bread-kneading on my right shoulder) though I don't think I saw dawn breaking, and must have slept very deeply after that, suddenly snapping awake at 6:40 – five minutes past my normal deadline for getting up. I felt really groggy, but managed to get myself up, dressed and downstairs fairly quickly.

When I got downstairs there was no sign of Bailey. Aidan had already left for work and the dog was flat out on his bed. He did come through to see me after a couple of minutes but was not his usual excited self.

Ablutions, a cup of black Lapsang (it is fasting day again today) and the 7 o'clock news got me more-or-less fully conscious, and the sight of his lead got Bailey back to his normal hysterically excited self.

To my surprise, I felt quite lively once we got walking and we got to the first gate in 14 minutes 45 seconds and completed the lap in 29 minutes 53 seconds.

I had my 110 grams of full-fat yogurt and a small banana for breakfast, but I goofed at coffee time. My automatic pilot made me a milky coffee (not much milk) and gave me a Lotus Belgian spiced biscuit – a total of about 50 calories. That in itself was not too serious, as my dinner would probably be under the limit, but it did interrupt the totally calorie-free time between breakfast and dinner.

This evening's dinner was griddled chicken breast with mash made from cannellini beans. This time I cut Pat's breast fillet lengthways to ensure that it was cooked through as she is a bit paranoid about undercooked chicken!

### **Friday 29 July 2016**

I had another good night's sleep, waking up for a loo visit sometime before 6am. After ablutions and before my first cup of tea I weighed in at 12 stone 13½ pounds, a pound and a quarter lighter than last week but 2¼ pounds above my lowest weight five weeks ago. I was delighted to see my weight taking a downturn after a pretty depressing climb over the past three weeks and a shocking spike last week. I had been worrying that the fasting diet had stopped working, but now I feel more positive.

Today's walk was disappointing, partly down to a doggy toilet break and partly to a number of rather tense encounters with other dogs. We took 16¼ minutes to get to the first gate and 31 minutes 53 seconds to complete the walk. The week's total walking time was 2 hours 35 minutes.

We went to Buxton to visit Alistair's family, and had an outstanding lunch at a new French brasserie – the food and atmosphere really were authentically French – definitely one to visit again and again.

### **Monday 1 August 2016**

I have had quite a lot of pain around my right hip over the weekend – it feels like a sciatic nerve problem but the pain is highly localised at the top of the gluteus maximus (bum cheek) muscle: literally a real pain in the arse! It probably wasn't helped when I decided to mow the lawn yesterday afternoon.

I hoped it might have been improved by a night's sleep but it was still with me this morning. I seriously doubted that I would cope with walking Bailey, but I surprised myself by reaching the first gate in 15¼ minutes and completing the walk in 31 minutes. The pain only came back when I started bending and twisting to set up for breakfast. It has been far less of a problem than yesterday, so maybe the cause really is fading.

Pat was out this morning at Anton's – a long visit because he was being assessed by the deaf-blind charity Sense. At last Social Services seem to be paying some attention to our many emails, acknowledging that his visual problem is at least as disabling as the deafness which he has had – and managed – from birth.

So I spent the morning stripping yesterday's roast chicken for a curry (Waitrose sauce this time instead of Patak's, and not as good – we must have got it when we were experimenting with Ocado online shopping), making a strong stock with all the rubbish and cooking a huge bag of prunes for my breakfasts. Oh yes – and watching quite a lot of *Game of Thrones*.

### **Tuesday 2 August 2016**

The pain in the bum was quite bad when I got up this morning, so I did a full set of neck, shoulder and basic lower-back exercises before we went out. However, by the time we got back from the walk (16¼ minutes to the first gate and 32 minutes 48 seconds for the whole lap) it had mutated into a much more familiar version of sciatica, with a 'warm ache' running all the way down the leg. In a way this was a relief, because I don't like mystery pains!

My breakfast was 110 grams of full-fat Yeo Valley yogurt and a banana.

Before breakfast I did a full set of floor exercises for the back, and when I lay still on my back on the hard floor to cool down I was almost free of pain and could easily

have fallen asleep! Later in the day the sciatica really got bad, but doing a couple of hours of food prep for tomorrow's family visit eased it to some extent.

Dinner for both of us was a five-egg mushroom and spinach frittata.

#### **Thursday 4 August 2016**

I was too busy preparing for our visitors yesterday morning to record the walk and I remember nothing notable about it, so I guessed at the spreadsheet entry. We had a lovely if tiring morning and lunch with niece Bex, her husband Andy and their gorgeous little daughter Anya. They had to leave at 1:30pm to keep Anya's nap schedule on the rails, and we spent the first part of the afternoon clearing up and the rest recovering!

This morning's walk was pretty dire. My pain-in-the-bum syndrome was bothering me before I got up and didn't ease much once I was up. It did mutate into severe sciatica and nasty pain right across the back of my pelvis, though. I cut the walk by turning round at the 15-minute mark, at least 100 metres short of the first gate, and struggled to walk back – though, even with my legs feeling like lead and a very short pace-length, I did finish the walk in 29 minutes 54 seconds. Once home I did a full set of neck, shoulder and back exercises, followed by ten minutes lying flat on my back on the floor. This seemed to help.

Most of the morning was spent retrieving some lovely black-and-white photographs of Anya which Bex had WhatsApp'ed to Pat. We are new to *WhatsApp*, which seems to allow us to send and receive texts and MMS messages, which cost money using the phone service, free-of-charge via the Internet. It seems we can also use it for free phone-calls when we're connected to the Net – clever! I had to email the pictures from Pat's phone to myself and then retrieve them from my mail before *PhotoShopping* and printing them. Pat wanted five in a strip, and I had a long and expensive time feeding a sheet of glossy paper through the printer five times to all each one to the strip – plenty of trials and plenty of errors! There were also a few other [ictures to be printed more straightforwardly.

To my relief, the back exercises seemed to have worked really well – no more pain-in-the-bum and not much in the lower back, even after too much time on the office chair.

There was a bit of discussion about tonight's fasting dinner, and Pat decided she wouldn't mind going back to the smoked haddock we started with. Luckily I found a pack in the freezer.

#### **Friday 5 August 2016**

The pain-in-the-bum was with me each time I got up for a pee in the early morning and when I got dressed, but only moderately.

After my ablutions I weighed in at 12 stone 13¼ pounds, a quarter of a pound lighter than last week and only two pounds heavier than my weight at the end of the 8-week diet. I would love to get back to that – or even lower! - but I am reasonably satisfied.

Bailey seemed a bit down this morning. I didn't get the frenzied welcome I had got used to before Aidan joined the household, so maybe tht has confused him and Aidan's occasional nights away have disrupted him even more. He actually managed the first quarter of the walk without pulling, though he got more enthusiastic as we got nearer to the lane. We reached the first gate in 16¼ minutes after two back-to-back poo-bag duties and finished the walk in 31 minutes.

Proper breakfast (muesli, yogurrt and prunes) and lunch (crisped sourdough, charcuterie and cheeses) were really welcome after yesterday's fast, and we were looking forward to fish-and-chips later on.



After lunch I deadheaded the huge Buddleia in the back garden, which I pruned so successfully last year, and then had a long, cool shower and a shave to freshen me up after the 20-degree walk and the subsequent exertions.

### **Monday 8 August 2016**

We had grandson Barney to stay for the weekend, though he naturally spent most of the time with his Dad.

This morning I was awake very early, and after the second or third pee I was finding it almost impossible to relax. No matter how I lay, the pain in the buttock and sciatica down the leg got worse. Even lying flat on my back on the Tempur memory-foam mattress was painful, and at about 6:25 I gave up and got up. Aidan was just driving out of the gate as I came downstairs and Bailey was rather gloomy. I was in fairly urgent need of the loo, and after my ablutions I took two paracetamols, did my neck and shoulder exercises and the seated forward stretches, and then emptied the dishwasher and laid the table for breakfast. All this loosened things up nicely and I felt ready for a walk after the 7 o'clock news.

By the time we got to the halfway mark the leg and back had started playing up again, and the walk was poor in time terms, with the first gate reached in just under 17 minutes and the round trip completed in 33 minutes 18 seconds.

After a second cup of tea I did the full lower-back routine, which seemed to improve things a little.

With plenty of movement through the day my back eased, and before bed I repeated the entire set of neck, shoulder and back mobilising exercises in the hope that I wouldn't stiffen up during the night.

### **Tuesday 9 August 2016**

Last night's exercises worked: I slept soundly and was quite comfortable for the half-hour or so before I got up. Once I had got up, though, the sciatica set in with a vengeance. I did another full set of neck, shoulder and back exercises straight away and the walk went reasonably well – not painless but quite bearable. In spite of poo-stops, we got to the first gate in 15 minutes 21 seconds and finished the whole lap in 31 minutes 14 seconds.

I am fasting today. I don't know about Pat because she is having a day out with her two best friends. She has been finding the fasting hard, so I have suggested that she skips this one. I have nothing pressing to do, so I will probably manage two or three episodes of *Game of Thrones* (I did two yesterday while Pat was at Anton's). I need to make a point of getting up and moving around every half-hour or so, both for general health reasons and in order to avoid stiffening up.

At around 9:30 I realised that the car might be a little short of diesel. The trip computer told me there was enough for about 120 miles, but as we are going to Buxton tomorrow – a 100-mile round trip – I decided to do a quick run to Sainsbury's for a fill-up. We're now good for over 500 miles.

Fasting by myself seemed a lonely business – you can't talk about it to a dog! A thoroughly boring selection of Olympic sports didn't help. I got through three episodes of *GoT* and read quite a lot of the second book, but the day still dragged. Around 3pm I made up a large salad bowl, some of which will accompany a small frittata at dinner time.

I decided to switch from Aldi's Colombian coffee to Lazazza red using Aidan's Gaggia machine. The second little cup was fiercely strong but quite enjoyable. I had a cafetiere cup in the afternoon instead of dreary black tea.

The Olympic coverage improved dramatically shortly before Pat came home, with the match between our Johanna Konta and Svetlana Kuznetsova (winner of two Grand Slams). After a very close and tense match Johanna won in three sets, which made a great finale to the day for us.

### **Wednesday 10 August 2016**

I was very comfortable between waking sometime before 6am and getting up at 6:35, but by the time I got downstairs the sciatic nerve was beginning to complain. I did the upper-body exercise routine, leaving the floor routine until later, and we had quite a good walk, reaching the first gate in 16 minutes and completing the walk in 32 minutes 15 seconds. I have given up trying to beat the fifteen- and thirty-minute targets with too many dog encounters and poo-stops to fit in!

There was nothing much to report for the rest of the day. We watched quite a lot of Olympics – mostly gymnastics – and I went to bed at about 9:30pm, feeling very tired for some reason.

### **Thursday 11 August 2016**

Again, I was quite comfortable in bed this morning and – even after an early night – rather reluctant to get up at my usual time. The forecast heavy rain had finally happened, which might have given me an excuse to postpone today's walk, but habit prevailed and I got out of bed, with some protests from the sciatic nerve, went downstairs. The rain had eased off, so I did full exercise routine and had a fasting-day cuppa to give it a little longer. By the time we were ready to leave the rain had almost stopped. The lane was under water in the usual place, so we stayed on the quiet country road until we had done 15 minutes and finished the walk in 29 minutes 58 seconds.

I am fasting alone again today. Pat is discouraged because she hasn't lost any weight since the end of the eight-week sugar diet and has decided to take the week off. I haven't lost much either, but I am using the 5:2 diet for maintenance rather than weight loss.

After my meagre yogurt-and-banana breakfast this morning, followed by black tea, I went into town to get various essentials as cheaply as possible. I got Colgate toothpaste and Vosene shampoo from Poundland and then did really well in Wilkinsons. They had 6-packs of Plenty kitchen-rolls marked at half price: I bought two for a fiver! They are massively more expensive on Amazon, so well done Wilko! I picked up various other essentials, needing to take the bags back to the car before venturing further up the main street, with a quick call at Holland & Barrett and then a long haul up to our nice old-fashioned ironmongers for some hooks to hang our ironing board on (they didn't have any). It was nice to have a decent walk – a kilometre or so – without having my gait disorted by the dog! I got some hooks at B&Q after finding none at Wickes and finally dropped in on Sainsbury's for chicken wings (tomorrow's dinner). Amazingly, I was out for nearly three hours!

There was plenty of Olympic sport to watch through the afternoon and evening, with loads of rowing and then tennis. I cooked a frittata and ate it on my lap while Andy Murray put up a pretty poor performance against his Italian opponent but managed to pull himself together and win in the third set. Then Johanna Konta gave us a brave and fairly impressive, but ultimately doomed, battle with world number two Angelique Kerber, who was much calmer and more consistent than her previous opponent, Kuznetsova. Late in the evening the women's individual all-round gymnastics was astonishing: the standard just goes up and up.

## Friday 12 August 2016

My back was reasonably comfortable early in the morning but the sharp pain in the right buttock set in as soon as I started getting up at 6:30.

After ablutions, I weighed in at 12 stone 11¾ pounds. That is 1½ pounds lighter than last Friday and only half a pound heavier than my all-time low six weeks ago. I have now done 14 weeks on the fasting diet and am nine pounds lighter than I was when I hit the shocking peak shortly after finishing the 8-week diet. Another 4¾ pounds would see me down to my ideal 12½ stone. Maybe I could cut down to one fasting day a week at that point...

The walk was ok, although my buttock and leg were still quite uncomfortable. We made the first gate in 16 minutes 3 seconds and finished the walk in 31 minutes 19 seconds.

In the afternoon Pat got a little obsessive about cleaning so I offered to wash the kitchen floor and vacuum downstairs with the Sebo mains cleaner. My back didn't appreciate the stress and I was in quite a lot of pain for the rest of the day.

I was disgusted to find that the BBC hadn't provided a slot for Andy Murray's match against Steve Johnson. I really am losing confidence in our great national broadcaster. Eventually I looked at the sports app on my phone and got live video. Then I remembered that we have the same app on the new TV and was finally able to watch the second and third sets properly. Somebody at the Beeb really does need to get a grip.

We had home-cooked chicken wings and chips from our local pizza takeaway for dinner – really nice – and plenty of Olympics action through the evening.

I decided to do a full exercise routine before bed in the hope that I would benefit in the morning.

## Saturday 13 August 2016

I had a decent lie-in this morning but my back was still playing up when I came downstairs. It eased out with breakfast preparation, washing out and sterilising a load of takeaway boxes after throwing out a lot of old stuff from the garage freezer. In fact, I felt able to tackle a bit of DiY, putting a new hook up in the utility room to hang the new ironing board.

The rest of the day was devoted to the Olympics.

## Monday 15 August 2016

Yesterday I mowed the lawn and found manhandling the big Atco Admiral was becoming easier each time. Again, the rest of the day was about the Olympics, culminating in Andy Murray's magnificent match with Del Potro and his second gold medal to join his second Wimbledon championship. Thanks to time difference, I didn't get to bed until 1:40am, but slept well and felt surprisingly fresh this morning.

I had to walk up to the local shop twice yesterday morning and noticed that my legs were moving freely and painlessly, in spite of skipping the exercises. They felt the same this morning, and we had a really brisk walk, reaching the first gate in 14 minutes 35 seconds and completing the round trip in 29 minutes 5 seconds. Admittedly I stopped the watch for Bailey's two poos, which I have never bothered to do before and which helped me to get more accurate timings.

We went to Anton's in the morning, visiting a nursery for a few potted plants and then stopping for a medium-sized shop at Sainsbury's.

In the afternoon Pat prepared another of Mary Berry's family recipes – a sausage and vegetable bake, our main reason for shopping in the morning. I grabbed the opportunity to catch up on an episode of *Game of Thrones*.

In the evening we got caught up in the men's 'omnium' cycle race – a really weird and insanely complicated race of about 150 laps with short sprints spread through it.

## **Tuesday 16 August 2016**

This morning was totally disrupted. I slept like a log and didn't check the time until 6:45, so I put my ablutions off until after the news. I took Pat a cup of tea, caught the news and then adjourned to the bathroom. I realised that I had put milk in my tea, which settled a small dilemma: today was scheduled to be a fasting day, but Aidan is bringing a friend home for dinner – and cooking it. I had been wondering how to handle this, but it was clear that I would have either to make this a one-fast week or to do my fasts on different days. Wednesday and Friday would make sense, but Friday is normally a fish-and-chips or wings-and-wedges night. The extreme option would be to fast on two consecutive days...

The walk, in bright sunshine, was very pleasant. We were nine seconds faster to the first gate than yesterday and the whole walk was just four seconds quicker. I have finally mastered the stopwatch function on my 10-euro watch so I can store the gate time and then stop the watch at the end with this still displayed.

I had quite severe sciatic nerve pain by the time I got back. The right foot was painful, and I couldn't decide that this was sciatica or the collapsed ankle replacement. I hope that has not suddenly taken a turn for the worse just before next Monday's review in Derby. The further I get away from the last surgery the more I dread another operation, which would be a right-ankle fusion with twelve weeks in a cast. If the pain persists I might try the splint again.

After breakfast we were talking about tomorrow, when we are having an appallingly early start. Alistair has asked us to look after Ewan and Tom while Julie is at work (at Waitrose – great staff offers!) and he has to be at a meeting outside his normal part-time hours. We need to be there at 8am, which means leaving no later than 6:30 and preferably more like 6:15 to allow for hold-ups, however unlikely that may be at that time of the morning. On reflection that makes tomorrow an idea fasting day – a very early breakfast, no lunch and possibly a late dinner. I will have to check what Doc Mosley says about fasting on two consecutive days.

## **Thursday 18 August 2016**

We got up at 5:30am yesterday for our grandparenting day in Buxton. We arrived at Alistair's at around 7:30 after a very easy drive and had a really good time with the boys. We took them to the Little Rascals soft play area, about a mile from where they live. Alistair had gone off with the child-seats, so we had to walk, and on the way back 5-year-old Tom and I decided to try to beat the other two home. We walked really fast, so that counts as a much better walk than my routine ones. We went to bed at 9pm.

After yesterday's early rise, I was sorely tempted to have a lie-in this morning, but habit ruled and I got up only ten minutes later than usual. I had a black tea to start today's fasting, though I hadn't yet decided about the second day. Mosley says two consecutive days are fine, with possible extra benefits, though I may find the second more difficult. We will see...

I was very stiff from the big walk yesterday and the 100-mile drive, so I did the kitchen exercise routine before taking Bailey for his walk. With difficult traffic and a near-encounter with two daft dogs, we were a little slow, reaching the first gate in 15 minutes 46 seconds and completing the walk in 31 minutes 9 seconds.

In spite of the fatigue and stiffness I managed to bag up all our empty bottles and jars, collect Pat's various trugs of garden refuse and add them to the already-filling builder's bag, and then carry/drag the results up our side path to the driveway. All this was achieved while keeping Bailey out of the way and preventing his possible escape! Then I had to empty the car, take out the shelf, put the back seats down, heave the bag into the boot and load up the glassware. Surprisingly, I felt less stiff and less weary by the time I had finished all this, and the drive to the tip and emptying of the bags were all quite easy. I even managed to remember to pick up our medication from the pharmacy *en-route*.

After dinner I watered the plants, again managing to keep Bailey out of the way. So, all in all, quite a productive day.

### **Friday 19 August 2016**

I was a few minutes late getting up this morning but managed to complete ablutions in time for the 7 o'clock news.

I was annoyed when I weighed in at 12 stone 13¾ pounds, two pounds heavier than last week. Fasting was not going to be practical today, so I think I will just have to accept the setback and try to stick to the programme.

This morning's walk went well, in spite of fairly unpleasant sciatica. We reached the first gate in 15 minutes 12 seconds and finished the walk in 30 minutes 42 seconds. I did the standing exercises after my second cup of tea and the floor routine after updating this diary.

Other than this, there is nothing really worth recording from today. I had toyed with fasting, but we usually have a cheerful weekend dinner on Fridays, with a reasonable intake of alcohol, so I decided to try to get back on form next week.

### **Monday 22 August 2016**

I woke at just before 6:30am with no memory of earlier awakenings and paused just long enough to exercise toes and ankle before getting up. My back was better than usual when I got up but was painful after the walk.

Today is a big one for the ankles: my routine review at the Royal Derby Hospital. I am fairly happy with both ankles and am sure I don't need any more surgery at the moment. It would take a lot of persuasion to get me back on the table and – more dauntingly – into another three-month rehabilitation programme. I have gone back to the start of this diary and found that it is just over two years since I started recording what was happening with my ankles.

We had an enjoyable weekend, with a visit to Retford farmers' market on Saturday morning and a visit from Alistair, Julie, Ewan and Tom yesterday. The dog had a wonderful time!

Life can return to what passes for normal now that the amazing 2016 Olympics are over. Thanks to mostly Lottery funding, GB had a great games again.

It rained quite heavily through the night but had stopped by the time I got up. There were quite big puddles on the lane, but not big enough to force a route-change. We got to the first field gate in 14 minutes 40 seconds and completed the walk in 30 minutes 14 seconds – quite good compared with most recent mornings.

I left for the hospital just before 12:30 for my 2:25pm appointment. Parking was vastly easier than normal. I had a look at Costa's and decided I would probably miss my appointment if I queued there – I only had an hour to spare! - and settled for a sandwich and a bottle of juice from M&S Food.

They were ten minutes late calling me for my appointment. To my surprise, I wasn't sent for the usual two x-rays. A young doctor arrived after about 20 minutes, asked me some questions and had a look at the ankles. He went off for a word with Mr Milner and we agreed that everything was as good as could be expected and I was happy to wait a full year for my next appointment (after the last two intervals of three and two months). I assured him that I would call if anything got worse.

The drive both ways was quite enjoyable, with the road works finally finished on the M1 giving it four lanes each way.

## **Tuesday 23 August 2016**

I didn't wake up until well after 6am this morning, and was so comfortable lying on my left side that I was tempted to treat myself to a lie-in. After all, I don't need to get up as 6:35 – it is just habit. However, when I rolled onto my stomach I felt a twinge of sciatica and decided to get up anyway.

I had put milk in my teacup before I remembered that this was a fasting day (specially important having missed a day last week). Fortunately I did remember before I poured the tea in!

It was a beautiful morning with the temperature just under 20 degrees, and we had a really enjoyable walk, reaching the first gate in 14 minutes 54 seconds and completing the walk in 30 minutes 6 seconds. We are promised temperatures in the high twenties later...

The rest of the day was very hot. I spent most of the morning watching *Game of Thrones* as Pat was at Anton's (postponed because of my travels yesterday) and had quite a lazy afternoon. I had no problem with the fasting, eating yogurt and a banana for breakfast and a 2-egg mushroom frittata for dinner.

## **Wednesday 24 August 2016**

I overslept this morning, looking at my watch for the first time at 7:50am. I got up straight away and managed to catch the 7 o'clock Radio 4 news, doing the ablutions afterwards.

When I opened the fridge door to get milk, one of the moulded shelves inside the door fell to the floor, depositing various bottles including a glass one of white wine which, miraculously, didn't break. The moulded runners on the back of the shelf had apparently just given up and broken. I put the shelf back and put only light items on it, at the back, and it held enough for me to get on with the morning routine.

The walk was slightly disorganised: I had to mess with the stopwatch for two poo-breaks and a slightly dodgy encounter with Heidi the Weimaraner, which caused me to reset the stopwatch instead of saving my time to the first gate! I recorded 15 and 30 minutes on the spreadsheet.

After breakfast I had a proper look at the broken fridge shelf, and decided that the best way to repair it would be to use a couple of self-tapping screws to hold it in place. In the end, after a long search, I had to resort to woodscrews, and my trusty Makita cordless drill/driver made short work of the job.

Later in the morning, in spite of the temperature hovering around the 28-degree mark, I decided to cut the grass. It was fairly short, so this was not too taxing. It looked a bit sunburnt when cut short, so I hoped there would soon be some rain.

Afterwards I had a look at our Ryobi line trimmer ('strimmer') and ordered a new spool and line from Amazon Prime. This electric machine is really not very clever, and I wish we had kept the Stihl petrol *débroussailleuse* (brush cutter) we had in France instead of selling it with the house (the chainsaw would have been handy, too, now that we have a woodburner!). With the motor on the cutting head instead of

behind the handle the Ryobi trimmer is unbalanced and really hard work to use, and the 1.5mm line wears away and breaks very quickly. The Stihl had a full harness and handlebars like a speedway bike.

I also managed to track down and order a spare key for our garden shed, which I have been trying to find for ages.

The afternoon was very hot, so we kept our activity to a minimum.

### **Thursday 25 August 2016**

This morning's walk was good, but with another stopwatch glitch. I stopped and retarted the watch twice for poo-breaks on the way out and pressed the lap-timer button to record the time to the field gate (14 minutes 29 seconds). Then the Thursday bin lorry came down the lane and I paused the watch for that. I must have got something wrong when the lorry moved on and ended up not timing the walk back! So I have recorded the correct time to the gate and a total time double that, which I don't think will be far wrong.

The trimmer bits sere due to arrive today, but it had rained quite heavily overnight so the grass will be a bit too wet today.

I have been encouraged that the severe sciatica I have had for the past few weeks seems to be easing. The sharp pain in the left buttock has mostly stopped, though there was still some discomfort this morning. I have had quite an ache around the right ankle (the one with the 'catastrophically failed' ankle replacement, as the young doctor described it on Monday) but haven't been able to decide whether it originates in the ankle or in the sciatic nerve. Obviously I favour the sciatica over a severe deterioration in the ankle!

When the spool and the spare shed key both arrived, I cleaned the trimmer and installed the new spool – with some difficulty: it is appallingly badly designed. I managed to trim the worst of the long grass from around the lawn, but I think what is really needed is to use an edging tool.

I had just got the trimmer back in the shed when it started to rain quite heavily, and we had around an hour of serious rain.

I had my usual mushroom frittata with a glass of chilled water for dinner, and then we caught up on some of the few TV programmes we recorded during the Olympics. Thank Heaven for the amazing Noel Fitzpatrick, supervet – two episodes back-to-back!

### **Friday 26 August 2016**

I had a good night's sleep in spite of my increasingly hyperactive bladder. I think the enlarging prostate must be constricting my urethra more, making me want to pee more urgently with less in my bladder. My nightly does of Tamsulosin helps with this, but the only step forward is transurethral resection of the prostate, a surgical procedure which, having heard our friend John's story, I will avoid until I need a full-time catheter.

I got up on the dot of 6:35 and made tea while Aidan was still in the bathroom. I took a cup up to Pat, who had been awake when I got up, and had swallowed my first sip when I remembered it was weigh-in day. I spat the second mouthful back into the cup and faced the music: 12 stone 13¾ pounds, exactly the same as last week when I only had one fasting day – unfair! On the plus side that is just two pounds heavier than the lightest I reached after the eight-week ordeal, which means I have been keeping my weight under control pretty well since switching to 5:2 fifteen weeks ago. I have been eating well – maybe worryingly well sometimes – without any obvious ill-effect.

We had a good walk this morning in bright sunshine. The sun is noticeably lower in the sky now as we move further from midsummer and as I was walking straight into it for most of the out lap my eyes weren't very happy. After a very wet night I was surprised that there was a clear path through the huge puddle we often have on the lane. We reached the field gate in 14 minutes 33 seconds and completed the round trip in 28 minutes 58 seconds, so we were marginally faster coming back than going out. The really good news is that I was not aware of any discomfort in my legs and ankles either during or after the walk, which I sometimes am. At the end of this week's five-walk cycle my joints feel better rather than worse than at the start.

I decided to look back at the original instructions I got from the School of Artisan food for maintaining and using sourdough cultures, as part of a review of my routine breadmaking. I have decided to make 24 rolls instead of three focaccia's (each of which I cut into eight portions for freezing). I was horrified to discover that the handouts from the course, which have lived at the bottom of my IN tray since March 2011, had mysteriously vanished. Luckily I had summarised the instructions on the website. They led me to try making a sourdough culture with a much smaller inoculation of old dough – 20 grams to 100 grams each of water and flour. This produces a stiffer batter because it doesn't inherit so much of the water produced by fermentation.

## **Tuesday 30 August 2016**

There was nothing much to record on Saturday and Sunday, apart from some nice time with grandson Barney who decided to spend Sunday night with us unexpectedly. Yesterday was fairly busy, though, with Pat's routine visit to Anton. I drove her over and then took Barney home on the other side of Sheffield. On the way back we called in at Jackie and Bob's to give them some hand-me-down clothes for Anya and ended up stopping for a light lunch. The final call was Aldi in Killamarsh (where they live) for a sack of dog food and some essential supplies for Barney to take back to university.

I had a good long sleep last night, waking sometime after 6am (at a guess) and finally checking the time on the dot of 6:30. While listening to the news, I made the 'sponge' for my next batch of sourdough (I forgot to do this at bedtime last night). The new batch of dough, made with only a 20-gram addition of the old dough, was highly active, so I expected to see the sponge wake up quite early.

We had an excellent walk (after my fasting day black tea) on this pleasant morning (temperature around 15 degrees), reaching the first gate in 14¾ minutes and completing the lap in 29 minutes 19 seconds. My feet felt really comfortable with just a hint of ache as I walked.

Today was forecast to be sunny with the temperature peaking at 22 degrees but I think it went quite a lot higher, which made my sourdough bubble like crazy in the kitchen and the bread rise much more than usual. I decided not to try making a standard focaccia but to put eight 'rolls' on each baking sheet. What I produced with this incredibly elastic dough was very roughly shaped lumps which spread to fill the baking sheets and rose really well. They looked like slightly mis-shapen white baps, but with firmer crusts, and were all joined together, wasting no space at all on the sheets unlike my attempted focaccias. See tomorrow's entry for a report...

I ended the fasting day with a two-egg frittata and a couple more cups of black tea. Fasting is really no trouble for me at all.

## **Wednesday 31 August 2016**

There probably won't be a tasting report on yesterday's bake today because we are going to Buxton to buy Tom some new school shoes.



I was totally comfortable lying in bed until about 6:25am, when my over-active bladder got me out of bed. The walk was good again, though my feet – the right heel area in particular – were a little more painful than yesterday. We got to the first gate in 14 minutes 57 seconds and complete the walk in 30 minutes 13 seconds.

After I had showered and changed, Pat decided to go to Buxton by herself – something I have always advised against because the 100-mile round trip, much of it in hilly open country, is quite hard work, and when I drive it I know I have backup from her. In the end she arrived home safely. So I had a free day to catch up with *Game of Thrones* (I am reading the books and watching the series in parallel and I had got behind with my viewing). Later I watched *Bridge of Spies* – a low-key true-story movie about the prisoner exchange which got U2 pilot Gary Powers back to the USA.

Once the sun was low I watered all our pot plants generously. I was particularly careful with my late son Dave's rose, which I moved in February and later transferred to a pot because it was looking very poorly indeed, with dreadful black spot fungus. When I cut it right back I was convinced that I had removed all the named rose growth, leaving only root stock, but recently it has picked up, growing quite vigorously and already producing one gorgeous bloom. It had three more flower buds now, one about to open. I am thrilled to bits with this recovery, as is my daughter Sarah, to whom I have been emailing pictures regularly.

### **Thursday 1 September 2016**

Another fasting day, the end of 17 week in which I think I have only missed one day, so 33 fasting days completed. I got up at 6:35am and went through the usual routine, with black tea, of course. We reached the first gate in 15 minutes 57 seconds, the time affected by two poo-stops and the bin lorry coming down the lane and back again. I managed to pause the watch for the poos but didn't bother for the lorry, so our real walking time was probably better than my estimate of 30 minutes 55 seconds – estimated because I messed up with the stopwatch again!

After the routine morning admin tasks – disposing of well over a hundred junk emails, checking transactions in our bank account and updating the spreadsheet, starting the day's entries in this diary – I made and drank two mugs of black coffee, giving Pat and Bailey their biscuit rations while I fasted. I also diagnosed an apparent problem with our loivey new cordless vacuum cleaner, which didn't show the charging light when the cleaner was docked: it turned out that the handheld vac hadn't been clicked fully into place so it wasn't making a circuit with the charging contacts – easy. In the middle of the morning I gave all our potted and containerised plants a good dose of Miracle-Gro plant food and then mowed the grass, cutting it slightly shorter than I ever have before and about as short as the mower allows. All this only got me through to what would have been lunchtime if I wasn't fasting. The sunny but initially cool morning of this first day of Autumn had warmed up nicely, and I ended work in quite a sweat.

My stomach was protesting at its emptiness during the afternoon – maybe too much black tea. I had to drink two large glasses of water to settle it down. I was very relieved when 6pm came and I was able to prepare my frittata. Breakfast at 8:30am and dinner at 6:30pm – ten hours without a single calorie!

### **Friday 2 September 2016**

I woke for the loo at 6am, noticing raindrops on the en-suite window so good news for the garden, and had a totally comfortable half-hour lazing away the minutes until my normal rising time. I was equally happy in every position I chose to try, with no joint pain at all except the long-term problem with my right shoulder, which was barely perceptible.

I was totally constipated after yesterday's frugal eating, but still weighed in at 12 stone 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds. This is my joint second-lowest weight. I weighed the same three weeks ago and was only lower once – by just half a pound – eight weeks ago, when my total weight loss clocked 30 pounds. Significantly, these three lowest weights were all scored weeks *after* the end of the eight-week programme, the lowest at the end of the eighth week of fasting when I had lost the 30 pounds. The highest total weight loss on the eight-week diet was 28<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds. So intermittent fasting works for maintenance of a weight achieved on a different programme *and* for continuing moderate weight loss. It looks as if my target of 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> stone (34<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds for my American reader) might actually be achievable. I certainly don't feel any inclination to give up fasting.

The rain had stopped before I got up, so we had a good walk. My legs felt strong and I kept up a brisk pace with longer-than-usual strides, reaching the first gate in 14 minutes 49 seconds and completing the walk in 29 minutes 12 seconds.

So a very positive morning thus far. Pat was out for a couple of hours, so I caught up with a bit more of *Game of Thrones* before lunch, then did a quick emergency shop before putting a curry dinner together.

### **Monday 5 September 2016**

We had a fairly uneventful weekend, mostly centred round what turned out to be a very dull Italian Grand Prix.

This morning's plan went slightly awry. The walk was fine, with the field gate reached in 14 minutes 53 seconds and the route completed in 29 minutes 39 seconds, but partway round I realised that I had forgotten to pick up and post two birthday cards which were waiting in a very conspicuous position. So as soon as we got back I took them – and Bailey – to our local Post Office, giving us a total walking time this morning of 43 minutes 16 seconds. I felt no ill-effects from the extra mileage, which is encouraging.

Pat made her usual Monday morning visit to Anton's, so I took the opportunity to watch two episodes of *Game of Thrones* – the last of season four and the first of season five, which Aidan downloaded for me, along with season six, last week. I am still reading the books in parallel with watching the series, which is a little confusing because the excellent TV adaptation doesn't follow exactly the same narrative route as the show.

We had magnificent cheese, mushroom and onion omelettes with sauté potatoes, peas and corn, which will make tomorrow's fasting dinner of an unadorned frittata seem rather dull. I don't mind this, though: the fasting is a serious project which is delivering serious benefits, and it only affects two days a week.

### **Tuesday 6 September 2016**

After yesterday's extended walk, I decided to revert to the longer route for this morning's walk. It was a gorgeous morning, with the temperature already around 20 degrees at 7:10am, but this meant I had to low Autumn sun right in my eyes for most of the out-lap. We passed the first gate in well under 15 minutes and reached the second – the old 20-minute mark – in 18 minutes 50 seconds. The nominal 40-minute walk was completed in 37 minutes 50 seconds, with me drenched in sweat but no worse for the extra exercise.

Today is yet another fasting day, the first of week 16. I am hoping that the extra 50 minutes or so of walking will help keep the weight-loss going.

There was a piece on the tremendous health benefits of outdoor exercise on TV this morning. As a five-day-a-week country walker I could feel agreeably smug.

Pat was out with 'the girls' today, which gave me a chance to devour a few more episodes of *Game of Thrones*, so I tried to get as much of my routine rubbish (including writing this diary, but also dealing with the usual hundred of junk emails and updating the financial spreadsheet) done as early as possible.

I made a mushroom, onion, garlic and organo two-egg omelette instead of a frittata, but it stuck in the non-stick pan – sugars from frying the onions, probably. Tasty though, and with a cup of black tea to follow it took me through yet another fasting day.

### **Wednesday 7 September 2016**

This morning's walk was difficult. After no less than three poos and two bags Bailey got very excited about a spaniel and a terrier being led by one of the long-time locals. I simply couldn't hold him back and there were a few nasty snarly seconds before we got the dogs separated and I got a snappy critique of my dog-management. In spite of this we passed the first gate in exactly 15 minutes, reached the second in 19 minutes 25 seconds and completed the walk in 38 minutes 50 seconds. It was dull but again around 20 degrees, and I was dripping sweat when I got home. My second cup of tea *with milk* was wonderful!

I got through a variety of odd jobs, mostly in the garden, during the day. In spite of the dull weather it was very hot and humid, and by late afternoon I was glad to sit outside to catch the very light breeze.

I converted two frozen packs of our bolognese sauce with some Thai chilli sauce and a can of borlotti beans into chilli con carne, but I was a little heavy-handed with the chilli, making the dish a bit of a struggle to eat, even for me!

### **Thursday 8 September 2016**

Last night's chilli meant I had a bit of a battle to finish brushing my teeth before I got on the loo!

This morning was bright, with a little high cirrus cloud and haze, but cooler than yesterday at around 16 degrees, so I put my old fleece on for the walk, albeit unzipped. The hazy low sun in my eyes was quite easy to cope with. I still worked up a fine sweat. I kept up a careful watch for other dogs, but we had the route more-or-less to ourselves today.

There was a bit of confusion with pausing the stopwatch for two poo-stops, so my timings were a bit approximate: the first gate in 14 minutes 30 seconds, the second in 18 minutes 12 seconds and home in 38 minutes 20 seconds. I was feeling no ill-effects from this week's longer walks.

I had to clear out the utility room this morning to allow the boiler service engineer access. I also cleared everything off the kitchen floor and vacuumed it so that Pat could mop it. I then did the rest of downstairs. The engineer will be back tomorrow afternoon to fit a new flue to the boiler as it is badly rusted and leaking.

I am writing this bit just before 3pm. I feel fine after two cups of black tea, whereas on Tuesday my stomach felt irritable, but I am looking forward to my dinner – frittata or omelette again! – in a bit over three hours. Then a clear run of four fast-free days.

I am hoping to see some more significant weight-loss tomorrow. If I do, I am wondering whether I might try just one fasting day each week for maintenance.

### **Friday 9 September 2016**

However, that is a decision which will have to wait, as my weight this morning, at the end of eighteen weeks of intermittent fasting, was exactly the same as last week's and the one from four weeks ago: 12 stone 11¾ pounds – my second-lowest weight,

only half a pound higher than the all-time low on the 7 July. I had hoped that the four longer walks would have burned a few calories, but I am relieved that I haven't put any weight back on after last week's dramatic two-pound fall.

We had a good walk, but the stopwatch rules got a bit bent by two poo-stops, one of which involved me wiping my hands on lots of wet grass. Allowing a margin for error, we reached the first gate in 14 minutes 50 seconds and the second in 19 minutes 51 seconds. We were home again in a total of 39 minutes 30 seconds. The total walking time for this week is 3 hours 18 minutes.

The ankles and knee have stood up really well to the five longer walks. At the moment I am not really aware that I am moving around on one ankle that is recovering from fairly violent surgery and the other in which the joint replacement has suffered 'catastrophic failure'. There are twinges, but that is hardly surprising at the age of 73!

I really enjoyed my post-fast lunch: a couple of slices of pork pie and a portion of my latest sourdough with Stilton, Camembert and Caemphilly cheeses, with a nectarine to follow. (As I write this I am looking forward to chicken-wings and fries for dinner.)

We finally did get the boiler serviced this afternoon, so I had to clear everything again to make room and then put it all back.

Then I decided to replace some blown halogen spotlights in the kitchen – a really fiddly job requiring a stepladder and considerable dexterity. Whoever designed these downlighters with their fiddly little wire clips needs shooting. Afterwards I decided to investigate what LED bulbs might have become available since I last checked, and ended up buying 5-watt spotlights to replace the 50-watt ones and some candles for the kitchen chandelier (Amazon Prime, of course).

## **Monday 12 September 2016**

Saturday was uneventful, but yesterday afternoon we went blackberry-picking, accompanied by Bailey. This involved a ten-minute walk from and back to the car, giving me an exercise bonus. We didn't find much of a crop, and the picking conditions were difficult, with tall nettles mixed into the brambles or forming a barrier in front of them. We both got badly stung, and I finished with a nasty fall: my foot went down a deep hole and I landed on my bare forearms on ground with tough old bramble stems lying flat on it and nettles all around. Luckily the ankle didn't seem to have suffered any damage and was fine this morning. One bramble got wrapped around my right ankle with the thorns firmly hooked into my jogging bottoms, and there was no clear ground for me to get my hands down, so getting up was quite difficult. In the end I had to make do with one hand on the ground, regardless of thorns, and a hand up from my 4-foot 11-inch wife! My right forearm was badly scratched and the junction between two of the fingers was bleeding profusely. I went back to the car with Bailey, leaving Pat to pick a few more berries. Luckily there were some sealed antiseptic wipes in the first-aid kit so I was able to clean myself up while I waited. This year's nettles must have particularly fierce venom, because the stings were still keeping me awake at around 1am.

Today began with the low sun shining brightly and the temperature a little over 10 degrees. My bladder drove me out of bed - where I would have loved to stay – at 6:30am.

It is worth mentioning here that I seem to have mastered the technique of only waking up enough to get myself to the loo and back to bed, usually going straight back to sleep and having no idea in the morning how many times I have got up. My water glass gives me some indication, as I usually only allow myself a sip after getting back into bed, and sometimes it is almost empty.)

My hands and forearms were still itching and stinging from yesterday's adventure when I got up.

I was able to maintain a brisk pace all the way round this morning's walk. We passed the first field gate in 14 minutes 40 seconds and reached the second in 19 minutes 7 seconds, completing the walk in a decent time of 38 minutes 40 seconds. I am really encouraged that neither ankle is causing me any real grief,

Pat was at Anton's this morning, so after doing a couple of chores – the most urgent being to clear all the useless stuff out of the fridge – I was able to settle down to two episodes of *Game of Thrones*, towards the end of season 5 with only the ten of season 6 left. I understand that they won't be filming season 7 until sometime next year, so perhaps I should ration my viewing...?

## **Tuesday 13 September 2016**

It was warmer this morning – still fresh but not needing a sweater or jacket. The forecast is for very unseasonal heat, with temperatures in the high twenties later.

We were a little quicker all round than yesterday, reaching the first gate 15 minutes earlier (14 minutes 25 seconds), the second 53 seconds earlier (18 minutes 46 seconds) and the finish 24 seconds earlier (38 minutes 16 seconds).

By lunchtime the weather forecast was coming true – and then some. I had the kitchen digital thermometer on the patio table, in the shade of the large umbrella, and at 2pm it was showing just under 30 degrees. Pat saw on the BBC News app that today was already the hottest September day since 1949 (when she was four and I was six!). It was much cooler indoors than out, so I decided to come in and hide.

At 6pm I was looking forward to some food, but I felt fine after about nine hours without a single calorie passing my lips. Tonight was a bit of a cheat as Pat had made a Chicken Caesar Salad, which I couldn't resist. I just had to make an 'educated' guess as to how much I could eat without undermining my calorie target. I think I was reasonably honest about this!

I made a decision about after-meal cups of tea today. 100ml of semi-skimmed milk has a convenient 50 calories, so a modest 20ml shot in a cuppa only adds 10 calories – but improves the taste dramatically! So two cups of white tea a day, when I am allowed 600 calories and if they are part of my meals, are pretty insignificant.

## **Wednesday 14 September 2016**

After yesterday's amazing – if exhausting – weather, this morning sprang a real surprise: it was grey and hazy and relatively cool. The BBC forecast suggested that this might persist through the day in Eastern England. I didn't know whether to be relieved or disappointed.

With a temperature of 16 degrees and damp air it felt quite fresh when Bailey and I set out. We were a little slower than yesterday, for no obvious reason: 15 minutes 20 seconds at the first gate, 19 minutes 58 seconds at the second and 40 minutes exactly for the full lap.

It wasn't quite as hot as yesterday at the peak, but still pretty enervating. I spent a fairly challenging halfhour replacing the rope 'halyard' on our old sun umbrella. All I had was orange polypropylene rope, which didn't blend very well with the rustic colour scheme of natural wood and sun-bleached green canvas, but we decided to leave it and get a new brolly next year – a cantilever one that doesn't need to be in the centre of the table and will provide more controllable shade.

We also spent quite a while planning a holiday – a week in an apartment rather than a hotel on the Costa Brava, with a leisurely drive down and back through France. We decided to use Brittany Ferries between Portsmouth and Caen to avoid the tragic

chaos around Calais. There are complications with Aidan and the dog, so we didn't finalise anything.

We had a pickup load of logs delivered in the late afternoon, and as the truck wasn't a tipper I helped with unloading. Tomorrow morning, before it gets too hot, I will need to start barrowing the wood to the shed and stacking it – not the ideal job for our third very hot day!

For dinner I got a proper grown-up portion of Pat's Caesar Salad after the small one I had for yesterday's fast.

### **Thursday 15 September 2016**

This morning started fairly warm but very foggy. The walk went well, though: 14½ minutes to the first gate, 18 minutes 53 seconds to the second and 38 minutes exactly for the whole route – all good set against this week's other times.

I went out as soon as we had finished our after-breakfast cups of tea (mine with the new fasting-day allowance of milk), shifted the wheelie-bins out of the way, brought the wheelbarrow up from the bottom of the garden and got stuck into shifting the logs from the forecourt to the woodshed behind the house. We usually have one builder's bag of logs delivered at a time, and I find dealing with that pretty hard going, but our log-man had said the pickup-load was equivalent to about one-and-a-half bags. Nevertheless, I managed to shift and stack the load without a break, finishing around 10:30. I lost count of the numbers of barrow-loads I moved.

By the time I had finished and swept up, my lower back was screaming in protest and the sweat was rolling off me. However, after a cup of coffee, a long slow shower and shave, and another coffee, I was feeling fairly human again – though fully justified in taking the rest of the day fairly easy!

This is by far the most high-energy work I have done on a fasting day. I hope I will see the benefit of all that calorie-burning on the scales tomorrow morning.

I really did have a mostly lazy day, with the most demanding job being to put together a very large batch of Bolognese sauce. We are expecting Alistair's gang on Saturday and plan to serve a very big lasagne. The batch of sauce I made will deal with that and will fill many containers for the freezer.

I have been having trouble uploading updated versions of this document using the *FileZilla* FTP client, so I have been trying to do it using *Internet Explorer*. I couldn't get this to work but found a forum where lots of people have been trying the same thing, and I now know that I can simply open *Windows File Explorer*, type in the FTP address and treat the resulting folder window just as if it is for a folder on the PC. I have logged in just once and gone back several times, so I assume that once is enough. I don't even have to enter the address again – there is a dropdown listing addresses previously accessed from the address bar of the window. This is much slicker than using an FTP client.

### **Friday 16 September 2016**

I thought I heard very distant thunder sometime between 5 and 6am, and the kitchen roof looked damp from our en-suite window. Rain was forecast for this morning but the paving outside the back door was only a little damp. It was warm, at around 17 degrees, and quite humid.

I had a completely unproductive visit to the loo this morning – not unusual after a fasting day – but my weight was still a quarter of a pound less than last week's at 12 stone 11½ pounds and only a quarter more than my all-time low 11 weeks ago. If I feel a more serious loo visit coming on later I will try before-and-after weighings. Small changes, but in the right direction...

The walk was encouraging, too. We reached the first gate in just under 14 minutes and the second in 18 minutes 38 seconds – 15 seconds faster than yesterday's low. We completed the walk in 37 minutes 49 seconds, also a new low.

### **Monday 19 September 2016**

I woke up just before 5am and didn't get back to sleep before it was time to get up at 6:35. My stomach was very uncomfortable. It hasn't been quite right since the post-fast constipation on Friday, which was followed by an absolutely volcanic visit to the loo on Saturday. It was as if whatever was in my gut had had an extra 24 hours to ferment and had really made a good job (no pun intended) of it. This morning's loo visit was pretty average, but continued to feel generally bloated with a pain below my left-side ribs.

I managed the walk in spite of this on what was a depressingly grey and drizzly morning. We passed the first gate in 14 minutes 40 seconds, reached the second in 19 minutes 12 seconds and completed the walk in 38 minutes 37 seconds – a bit slow compared with most of last week's times but not bad. I was certainly glad to get home.

The new satnav I had ordered from Amazon arrived yesterday, but it turned down to be pretty unimpressive and possibly faulty. I returned it later in the day with a very critical note. It is a Garmin like my old one, with a much higher specification and far more difficult to use.

### **Tuesday 20 September 2016**

Another fasting day – the beginning of week 20.

For the first time in a while I slept through to 5:35am after just one earlier trip to the loo. As usual I spent the spare hour brooding about things that really didn't need brooding about and got up just after 6:30.

I remembered not to put milk in my tea.

There had obviously been a bit of rain earlier but it had stopped by the time we were ready for the walk. However, it did start again soon after we left and was a little heavier than yesterday's drizzle – not enough to bother me, though, except that I had to zip my fleece up and was therefore quite hot and sweaty by the time we got home.

We were quicker than yesterday: 14 minutes 17 seconds to the first gate, 18 minutes 44 seconds to the second and 37 minutes 17 seconds for the whole walk.

Breakfast was my usual yogurt and banana mix followed by a cup of tea with milk.

We went to see Anton, who was a little more cheerful than usual, and then to Harveys to look at sofas. We were quite underwhelmed, and also are going to find it difficult to choose something we both like. I prefer leather, while Pat prefers fabric, which will be ruined by the first cup of coffee or glass of red that we spill on it. My absolute priority is comfort, whereas Pat chooses entirely on appearance (in spite of her bad back and the fact that she is uncomfortable on our current sofa and thinks it aggravates her back!). She later found a leather one on Ebay which we could collect from nearby Rotherham, but we will see...

Dinner was the spinach and mushroom frittata, which I really enjoyed. Following my recent decision I allowed myself a cup of tea with milk. All other drinks through the day were calorie-free. I found this fasting day quite comfortable – my body must be adapting to the fasts.

## Wednesday 21 September 2016

This morning was dank and dismal, but quite mild. The first cup of tea – with milk – went down really well. We passed the first gate in 14 minutes 25 seconds, reached the second in 18 minutes 49 seconds and completed the walk in 37 minutes 41 seconds – all three times a little quicker than Monday's but a bit slower than yesterday's. I was a little footsore when we got home and still sweating freely fifteen minutes after that, so obviously a good aerobic workout.

We went to Harveys in Sheffield look at sofas but came away pretty fed-up. We couldn't agree on what we were looking for, and any that we fancied were colossally expensive and on very long delivery times unless they were showroom display items. We gave up and Pat spent the rest of the day on Ebay and other sites with limited success. Then she discovered PreLOved.co.uk and found one really promising 3-seater.

Racking our brains for a short holiday, we had been looking at a few beach days in South-West France, but when I checked the temperatures for October it didn't look too promising – a likely maximum of 20 degrees. So looking at this week's Travelzoo Top 20 Pat found a deal for a three-day break at a spa resort in North Cornwall. There was an option to add extra days so now we are going for six nights from the 9 October.

## Thursday 22 September 2016

I had a very bad night, with virtually no sleep between around 4am and 6:40 when I got up. I wasn't worrying about anything, but I simply could not get back to sleep after the 4 o'clock loo visit.

Black tea marked the beginning of yet another fasting day.

The walk was going quite well until we met Heidi the Weimaraner halfway back up the lane. I had Bailey on a very short lead, and – as far as I can remember – he jerked across in front of me and I fell over him, somehow holding on to the lead. I ended up with blood on both hands, from two little cuts on the left palm and a nasty little graze on the outside of the right, just at the base of the pinky. I also banged my right knee – the dodgy one – quite hard, which made walking back a little painful. It seemed that the end of my nose actually touched the tarmac, but fortunately it was no more than a touch. Heidi's lady owner managed to hold Bailey and Heidi while I got back on my feet.

This episode convinces me that Bailey is a bit powerful for us and – like George – should probably go to someone younger. Alistair and Julie have already expressed an interest. Aidan's ex, Nicky, has offered to take him while both we and he are away, and he thinks she may want to keep him.

I logged a total time for the walk of 38 minutes 50 seconds with no adjustment for the delay, so the true time was probably nearer 00:17:50. We passed the first gate in 14 minutes 35 seconds and the second in 18 minutes 58 seconds.

At coffee-time I forgot this was a fasting day and put milk in my coffee and a Belgian bûche on the tray. I worked out that the milk (semi-skimmed) contained about 10 calories and the dainty little biscuit had 38, so call that a 50-calorie error. Not too serious in terms of the day's allowance but a failure to stay calorie-free from breakfast until dinner. I may pay for that on the scales tomorrow.

Most of the morning was spent searching PreLOved.co.uk for a 2-seater sofa to go with the 3-seater we had seen. Around lunchtime we struck gold, finding two really promising looking ones at frankly silly prices, but could only contact the sellers through the website (apart from one who had given a mobile number, and we got the



engaged signal every time we called it). Unfortunately the website doesn't have a 'buy now' button like Ebay or a 'buy with one click' one like Amazon.

We switched to Ebay later and found some quite promising sofas.

### **Friday 23 September 2016**

I had expected the right knee to be quite painful after yesterday's fall, but I slept quite well until well after 5am and got up feeling quite fresh at 6:35. My trip to the loo was totally unproductive again and my weight was exactly the same as last week: 12 stone 11½ pounds, still just a quarter of a pound above my longtime low. If only I hadn't had that milk in my coffee and that sugary biscuit...

We had a bit of a misunderstanding last night, with Aidan believing that Bailey's walks were too much for me (we have only been walking together since the 2 June, with a 30-minute target until the 5 September and 40 minutes for the last three weeks!). What I had actually said was that we would miss Bailey terribly when he leaves us for either Nicky or Alistair and his crew, and the only up-side was that my walking programme would no longer be compromised.

The fact that it *was* is proved by today's time: first field gate 13 minutes 15 seconds, 1 minute 20 seconds faster than yesterday; second gate 17 minutes 24 seconds, 1 minute 33 seconds faster; and the walk completed in 35 minutes 11 seconds, 3 minutes 39 seconds faster. The walk felt much more like a 'power walk', with long strides and a rapid pace-rate. I was more aware of my breathing than usual, too. And my ankles felt less stressed at the end of the walk.

The knee stood up to the walk far better than I expected, so I obviously haven't done it any real damage.

At some point during the day we decided to settle for the two six-foot leather sofas for sale on GumTree for £150. I manage to contact the seller on her mobile. She said they were in the car but she would get her partner to call when they got home. It turned out that the settees were in her parents' caravan in Ingoldmells, just north of Skegness. There followed a long and complicated three-way exchange of text messages between Aidan, the partner and me, complicated by the fact that Aidan was roadie-ing for Barney's band, which had two separate gigs tonight. In the end it was agreed that we could collect the sofas at around 1:30pm on Sunday, which tied in nicely in terms of time and location with Aidan dropping his girlfriend Donka back in Sleaford, which is about halfway to Skegness.

### **Monday 26 September 2016**

The trip to Ingoldmells went well, though the place itself – which I had imagined as a quiet satellite of Skegness – turned out to be a vast ocean of static caravans (literally thousands of them!) packed closely together amongst nasty-looking holiday attractions and populated by grossly obese people cramming chips into their mouths.

The reason for the visit turned out to be a no-no. The sofas were six inches longer than advertised, so just too big for us, and were covered in something called 'resurfaced leather' and were not very comfortable. So really a wasted journey.

At one point we stopped at a garage and my right knee – the long-term dodgy one which took a bang when I fell a few days ago courtesy of Bailey – buckled under me. I didn't fall, but something felt really nasty.

It was also tiring as Aidan was enjoying throwing his boss's Mercedes sports van around the windy roads. I was never frightened but was frequently uncomfortable. As a result I slept well last night and had a fight with myself over rising time. I did get up at 6:35am as usual, though.

I decided to risk trying the walk, and the knee didn't do badly, but I decided to revert to the short route. We did well, passing the first field gate in 14 minutes 48 seconds and completing the walk in 30 minutes 3 seconds. There were a few nasty twinges on the way back but the knee didn't buckle. I think I had better treat it gently for a few days so it doesn't spoil our forthcoming six-night stay in Cornwall (just under two weeks to go).

Another long sofa session this afternoon, checking dimensions on a whole raft of DFS ranges. With 4-year interest-free credit even four-figure prices are manageable! We decided we would visit DFS in Rotherham tomorrow. In the meantime I went through all their leather sofa ranges, checking sizes and making note on a list of 14 designs, most of them offering three-seaters about the same width as our current one.

## **Tuesday 27 September 2016**

The walk was compromised this morning. The right knee was quite swollen before I went to bed and no better when I got up. Starting the downhill stretch before the lane I was getting fairly nasty twinges, so I decided to head back home. However, once on the level I felt more comfortable, so we did a loop round the little footpaths that pass behind our house. The compromise wasn't too bad: we finished the walk in 24 minutes 28 seconds. The knee was aching but not too badly.

Today is a fasting day, but we are having afternoon tea out on Thursday, so I thought I would try just one fasting day this week. However, this plan got changed later. We went to DFS in Rotherham as planned yesterday. I took a long list of the sofas we liked on the websites, and we went looking for them on the leather side of the store. Hardly any of them were on display, and the one I liked the look of, which was on a fairly aggressive reduced price, was not particularly comfortable. We walked round the fabric side and Pat fell in love instantly with the most eccentric design in the shop. The sofas were traditional in shape but one of the two fabrics on display was a patchwork of oddly assorted designs, one with stylised stags' heads on it. Once I decided to give up on the leather it was a short step to a decision. We bought the three- and two-seaters on 48 months' interest-free credit, which will only cost about £36 a month! Delivery will be in five to six weeks, so we will have our new sofas before Christmas.

The salesman had given us coffee, with milk, and on the way home I decided I was feeling peckish. We are going to Cornwall in a couple of weeks, when I won't be fasting, so it was fairly easy to persuade myself to take a 2½-week break. So much for my iron self-discipline...

We had defrosted lasagne for dinner.

## **Wednesday 28 September 2016**

Aidan and Donka flew off to Bulgaria this morning, and it was pleasant to have no competition for the bathroom. I decided to put on a Supatherm neoprene knee support (the same wetsuit material as my ProSport ankle supports) which I haven't worn since I was ski-ing many years ago. I didn't feel very comfortable, but I thought the kneecap support might be helpful. I decided to do just the loop around the back lanes, extending it slightly to dump Bailey's dumps, so the walk was only 20 minutes 50 seconds long. The knee was aching gently in the background, but I didn't have any nasty moments with it.

My target for today was to get our large circular outdoor table and six folding chairs stowed for the winter. This set is in genuine solid teak and had silvered beautifully since I pressure-washed it in the spring. All the pieces are heavy. I can carry one chair with each hand, so that was three trips down the garden. The table is

something else: the only sensible way to move it is to fold the legs and roll it down the lawn and over the pond bridge. Once this was done, I moved the much smaller table and four chairs into the big one's place, which gets the most sun.

The rest of the day was fairly lazy as we were both feeling very tired. The stress of finding and buying furniture, perhaps?

We finished the lasagne for dinner. There will be neither lunch nor dinner tomorrow as we are having afternoon tea at Thoresby Hall, thanks to a voucher from Aidan and Helen last Christmas.

I *will* get back to the fasting and the full walks after Cornwall...

### **Thursday 29 September 2016**

The knee wasn't feeling too bad this morning, but I put the support on anyway. We took one of the old routes which I used to do with George, involving the back lanes used yesterday but going much further and getting a lap of the football pitch next to the 'Civic Centre' (village hall!). We completed the lap in 26¾ minutes. It was hard going for me because on all these unfamiliar routes Bailey has to stop and sniff absolutely everything!

Afternoon tea at Thoresby Hall was very pleasant. We brought some of the goodies home in a box and ate most, but not all, of them later.

### **Friday 30 September 2016**

My first weighing in a non-fasting week was depressing: 2¼ pounds heavier than last week. Surely this can't be just the missed fasting days...

The knee was still tender this morning, so I put the support on again. We did the same route as yesterday, but quite a bit more slowly, finishing in 28 minutes 33 seconds.

Last night the PC went off on a major system update imposed remotely by Microsoft without so much as a by-your-leave, and when I started it this morning it stuck with the whole desktop populated but no icons on the taskbar. The mouse pointer moved ok but there was no response to eight the buttons or the keyboard – very frustrating. Eventually I got fed up of watching the little circle revolving by around midday and decided that I would have to do a power-down forced reset. I was slightly delayed watching the death throes of the amazing Rosetta space mission, so it was shortly before 12:45 when I pressed and held the on/off button. Things happened very slowly, but eventually everything started working reasonably well – as witness, the fact that I am typing this! I tested web access and that looked OK too. Phew!!!

After lunch I checked the fuel level in the mower and saw that it was almost empty, so I grabbed the can and did a quick run to Sainsbury's. Then, with the knee support still in place from this morning, I managed to get the grass almost finished before a sharp shower of rain blew in. I was relieved that my knee stood up to manhandling the brute of a mower with very little discomfort. It seems that only certain moves cause grief – going up and down steps and ramps at Thoresby yesterday for example. The pain seems to be in muscles and tendons rather than joints. Very odd.

My last job of the day was a meal of roasted chicken wings and potato wedges.

### **Monday 3 October 2016**

We took Bailey to Buxton for the day on Saturday. He was brilliant and the whole of Alistair's gang fell even further in love with him. They took him on a huge walk right across Buxton and back, up hill and down dale, and by the time we got him in the car to come home he was totally worn out. He had been a bit hyperactive in the car going

over so I improvised a short leash for him with a lead and the safety belt, but I don't really think that was necessary.

My knee had been rather painful over the weekend so I put the big neoprene support on for the walk

It was a beautiful but cold Autumn morning, with the temperature at about 5 degrees, a brilliant low sun and no wind at all. We did the same route as last week in 26 minutes 55 seconds, meeting no alien dogs on the way.

Aidan's girlfriend Donka stayed here for the day while he went to work as they planned to get the first load of his possessions into his new house in the evening. She is a chef, and when Pat had gone off to Anton's we had a pleasant couple of hours chatting about food and cooking before she retired to have Skype chats with friends, catching up after their short holiday at her family home in Bulgaria. I took the opportunity to watch another episode of *Game of Thrones* – well into season six now, so I will soon have finished the whole set and will be waiting eagerly for season seven, due to be filmed next year. Meanwhile I am still ploughing through the thousand-page fifth – and, disappointingly, last – novel.

I am conscious that this has turned into a general diary rather than a record of my ankle problems. The fact is that I don't have any serious ankle problems at the moment. The left one – with the fusion which doesn't seem to have fused completely - sometimes aches a little, and the right one – with the 'catastrophic failure' of the replacement! - causes me no real grief at all. All this is really amazing. The right knee and shoulder are my real problems, and even they are not really disabling. I will find out how good the shoulder is when we start decorating after Aidan has painted the ceilings...

## **Tuesday 4 October 2016**

On another glorious – and slightly warmer at ten degrees – Autumn morning, Bailey and I repeated yesterday's route in 27 minutes 45 seconds, just in time to see Aidan and Donka off to work. The knee had been a little uncomfortable through the night, so I put the neoprene support in again but removed it as soon as we got home.

Today should have been a fasting day but, as I explained in last Tuesday's entry, I have decided to give myself a break until we get back from Cornwall.

I received my Sainsbury's MasterCard statement today. Because of poor website design, I only repaid £5 instead of £165, so I have had to budget to make this good. To my amazement, even with a large MBNA Visa bill which includes £390 for our stay in Cornwall, as well as the arrears and £200 a month to put back in the savings account, I finally seem to be getting the books to balance. This is so improbable that I keep going back to the spreadsheet and the bank websites to make sure I haven't buried a huge error somewhere!

In spite of many trips up- and downstairs, the knee is feeling a lot better and there is no real discomfort in the ankles. I was concerned that the knee might make sightseeing in Cornwall difficult, so fingers crossed.

I have been looking at the website for Nathan Outlaw's two Cornish restaurants. I think this might turn out to be quite a gastronomic stay, maybe including Rick Stein's seafood restaurant and chippie in Padstow.

## **Wednesday 5 October 2016**

It was yet *another* beautiful morning, with the temperature a little above ten degrees, a bright, low sun and no wind. Lying awake at around 6am, the knee suddenly started hurting. I was lying flat on my front with my legs out straight, and as soon as I changed position, bending the offending knee, the pain faded. This must be the result

of countless journeys up and down the spiral staircase when sorting out clothes for our short holiday next week. I put the neoprene support on as soon as I got downstairs.

A few minutes into the walk the ache started again, focussed on the kneecap, and I wondered whether it might actually be *caused* by the support. It was tolerable, but I had one really sharp spasm of pain when we were about two-thirds of the way round the route.

I forgot to restart the stopwatch after one of the poo-stops, so I logged the average of last week's times on the same route – 25 minutes 10 seconds.

If things go according to plan, I will only have two more walks with Bailey. It looks as though he will be joining Alistair's gang, in which case he will be walking right across Buxton and back twice a day on the school runs. And I will be able to pace my walks to suit myself, with no poo-stops.

### **Thursday 6 October 2016**

I was restless from a little before 4am and got up at 6:45 as usual. I was feeling very little discomfort in each ankle and the right knee, so I decided to try walking without the support. As yesterday, Bailey's complex toilet routine defeated the stopwatch (or, rather, the operator), so I recorded the same estimated time as yesterday: 25 minutes 10 seconds.

I saw Aidan before we went out and he told me that he will be taking Bailey across to Alistair's tomorrow. So only one more walk with the dog. I really don't know how I feel about this. We were hoping to leave Bailey here with Aidan on Saturday and say goodbye to him when we left for Cornwall, giving us a week without him before coming home without an insane doggy welcome. I know we are both going to miss him very much.

By the time we get back Aidan should be pretty well settled in his new house, so our routine is going to change dramatically. He should have painted all the downstairs ceilings, so we should be able to lose ourselves in decorating for a while.

I had the car valeted this morning and we spent most of the rest of the day sorting and packing all the stuff we will be taking with us to Cornwall. We have never been known for travelling light, but we seem to get worse as we get older! I am resisting the urge to take my gadget bag with the big flashgun and all the other photographic junk in it, and am only taking the Canon 300D camera kindly bought by the insurance company when we were burgled about 12 years ago, with just the standard lens and a spare battery, in the small case also provided by the insurers.

Somehow Aidan's plan got disrupted and Pat ended up with committing us to taking Bailey to Buxton tomorrow afternoon – not really what we need in the midst of our bungling preparations, but it might be a good thing to have our faffing time cut short!

### **Friday 6 October 2016**

This will be the last entry for more than a week as we leave for Cornwall tomorrow morning.

I felt very strange when I snapped awake at precisely 6:45 this morning, with a rapid and slightly irregular heartbeat. I don't know whether I was shocked out of a dream by my obsessive body clock, or what, but I felt better by the time I got downstairs and decided to go ahead with my last Bailey-walk.

In a light drizzle we repeated the now-usual route, disrupted by another encounter with the two Labradors, but I had to record an estimated time again as I forgot to restart the watch after one of the interruptions. So, like the last two days, the spreadsheet says 25 minutes 10 seconds – close enough.

At 8:10am, my heart rate was 78 beats per minute, with no hiccups during the ten-second timing, and at 9:25 the rate was exactly the same.

I am seriously considering trying to manage without my Naproxen non-steroid anti-inflammatory, even before seeing the doctor – not my favourite Dr Tang, sadly – on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the Monday after we come back from Cornwall. It has been identified as a possible cause of heart failure, which will make it the fourth such drug I have taken. The other three were discontinued because of the same side-effects. I think I will just try getting by on eight Paracetamol a day. Mr Milner took me off the Naproxen for six weeks while I was taking aspirin to prevent clotting after the fusion in October 2015 and I got by fairly well.

At around 2:30pm, after surreptitiously loading all Bailey's accessories into the car without him seeing what I was doing, we drove him to Buxton and handed him over to Alistair's gang. Once through the door he totally ignored us and didn't even seem to notice when we left. Traitor!

This will be the last entry for a week now as we depart for hopefully sunny Cornwall tomorrow morning. A night in Exminster tomorrow and then across Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor. We hope to lunch on fish and chips at Rick Stein's chippie in Padstow on Sunday before checking in at the Retallack resort.

### **Saturday 15 October 2016**

After the longest gap between diary entries we are back home and more-or-less back into a normal routine (whatever that is!). The computer went seriously pear-shaped after I had switched it off at the wall – something I haven't done for a long time because I know the battery is knackered – on the night before our departure. For some reason, I decided to switch it on again, and the machine simply would not boot up, just displaying a screen full of cryptic system jargon. Invitations to press F1 and F2 were accepted and achieved nothing, leaving me with no alternative but to switch the mains back off and hope for a miracle when we got back.

As you can see, I did manage to bring it back to life when we got home today, though I could not guess which of my chosen moves worked the miracle. I think it might have been the universal CTRL-ALT-DELETE. I do know I will be using the sleep facility tonight rather than a full shut-down...

We had a delightful stay in Cornwall, enjoying almost uninterrupted sunshine (except at Land's End, unsurprisingly) while our home, we were told, was putting up with a lot of wet and chilly weather. As a former resident of Cornwall I know how unpredictable its weather can be, so I was particularly grateful for this meteorological gift.

We had not one but two lunches of Stein's fish and chips, first in Padstow and second at Fistral Beach in Newquay. Without question the best fish and chips we had ever eaten, with beautifully fresh fish cooked to perfection in a wonderfully crisp batter – and very reasonably priced. On Friday we had lunch at Rick's Seafood Restaurant: very good but for me a slightly underwhelming main course and a whopping bill.

The drive home today was brilliant, with the satnav predicting arrival at 3pm but our arrival actually achieved half an hour earlier. Our ten-year-old Ford Focus went like a dream, frequently hitting 90mph on stretches of camera-free motorway – hard to believe I was driving a diesel car.

### **Sunday 16 October 2016**

It was strange coming downstairs with no dog to greet me and no need to avoid disturbing Aidan and/or Donka, or wait for the bathroom to become vacant. Strange, but really nice.

Pat was shocked at how messy the house looked. I thought it was fine, but she insisted on giving the big vacuum cleaner a serious workout (after I had taken out the seriously doggy-smelling bag) and doing tricks with ice cubes to take the dents left by the two-seater sofa from the sitting-toom carpet.

Aidan called over to collect some more of his possessions and we followed him back to Rotherham for a first look at his newly-rented house, which is really nice. Then home to a ready meal of delicious pork spare ribs and French fries, thanks to a visit to Waitrose on our second motorway stop yesterday.

### **Monday 17 October 2016**

With Bailey gone and the mornings becoming darker, plus a week's break for our holiday, I had decided to modify my weekday-morning routine, so I allowed myself to wake up a little later than usual this morning. I checked the time at 6:38 with no recollection of getting up or even being awake during the night, and took a few more minutes to get myself together. I felt rather groggy when I first got up, but soon recovered.

Yesterday I decided to stop wearing the compression socks all day every day, as my toes were feeling a little sore and the skin between knees and ankles was looking rather ancient. I wore some of my more ordinary socks yesterday and dithered about whether to wear these or the more supportive ones for my walk. I went with the soft option.

Getting out of the door was a lot easier without a frantic dog and a lead to deal with. I remembered to start the watch and set out with a long stride length and a rapid pace rate that took me to the first gate in 13 minutes dead and to the second in 17 minutes 5 seconds. The whole walk, with no real breaks in stride, took me just 33 minutes 38 seconds. I was hot, sweaty and a little breathless when I got home. The record of the walk didn't get onto the computer because by mid-morning it had crashed again and would not respond to any of my attempts to resuscitate it.

I had a look at *Worksop Life*, our local advertising magazine, and found just one computer engineer, and I booked a visit for Friday afternoon.

I fed my sourdough during the morning and mixed a sponge before bed.

### **Tuesday 18 October 2016**

I woke up earlier than yesterday, feeling a deal fresher for some reason. I did some preparatory work on the bread before going out, swathed in sweatshirt and cagoule because the rain had not stopped, though it did – more or less, before I got home. My pace was good again, but I was slower on all three measures. 13 minutes 30 seconds to the first gate, 17 minutes 42 seconds to the second and 35 minutes 34 seconds to the front door. I got set up for breakfast and the bread as far forward as time allowed, and then gave the computer one last try: nothing. I also got my old Toshiba laptop out and connected my two external hard drives, which allowed me to update *Outlook* for email and my diary. Between them, the bread and the computers occupied the rest of the day.

I had made the decision at the weekend that we really need to get back to sensible eating, with a regular intake of vegetables – something that had somehow got lost when we finished the 8-week blood-sugar diet. The first thing I wanted to put back in place was my visit to Worksop market – and particularly Darren Jelley's fish stall. This will start tomorrow.

For tonight, though, we would have to settle for spaghetti bolognese. We had just enough wholewheat spaghetti left for one meal, loads of sauce in the outside freezer.

## Wednesday 19 October 2016

Yesterday's walk was slower than Monday's, and today's was slower than yesterday's by exactly ten seconds on each timing, which suggests that I was ten seconds slower at the first gate but took the same time to get from there to the second gate and the same again to get from there to home – pretty amazing consistency.

My shopping plan was complicated by a shopping list that would require visits to Aldi and Sainsbury's. Then it got more complicated when Pat announced that she needed to visit the hospital for a rather obscure allergy test involving a blood sample rather than spots on the skin. So I ended up dropping her at the hospital and driving straight into town. The uphill walk through the market felt quite hard after the week's third fast walk. I had bought my fish – a nice salmon tail fillet to split into two, four sea-bass fillets and four enormous wild tiger prawns – and was telling Darren about our trip to Cornwall (it turned out that he was a big Rick Stein fan) when Pat called to say she had finished. I walked quickly back down to the car-park and was back outside the hospital in about ten minutes. We went straight to Aldi and spent a frightening amount of money and then to Sainsbury's before heading home for a well-earned cup of coffee. Aldi had bags of frozen scallops, which we hadn't seen for months, so we grabbed a couple to augment our seafood dinner.

I tried to do simple things on the laptop like pay my credit card bills and update this diary, but the machine seemed determined to thwart me, grinding along at snail's pace. I ran a PC speed-up program, but this didn't seem to do much good. I was so fed up that I even tried switching the desktop machine on again, but this was a total waste of time. I hope the engineer will be able to sort it out.

Dinner was a proper meal. I boiled some new potatoes, microwaved some sugar-snap peas which the fish was being prepared. I cut the salmon fillet into two down the centre-line, skinned the halves and floured them lightly. I fried these first, and then seared the scallops and cooked the prawns in their shells. Only the prawns, by far the most expensive items, were rather disappointing.

## Thursday 20 October 2016

This morning, when I got up at 6:40, looked pleasant with thin high cloud and patches of blue sky. The temperature was nine degrees. I left for my walk at 7:05. My pace felt good but the timings when I got back were a little disappointing: 20 seconds later than yesterday at the first gate, 22 later at the second and 53 seconds longer for the whole walk.

After catching up on painting an old nest of occasional tables, which I am having to do in short bursts because the shapes are too complex to paint in one go, I spent quite a lot of time this morning trying to wake the laptop up, and after running the tune-up program again it seemed to be responding a little more quickly, but as I finish writing this entry the performance is pretty dismal.

Or not! As I got ready to shut the machine down for the night it suddenly seemed to be responding much more quickly. The disc light seems to have been on almost constantly for the past few days but I have noticed just now that it is off most of the time. Maybe it has finally finished whatever it has been doing for the past few days...?

Signing off now. I just hope the improvement will still be there when I power up tomorrow. And that the engineer will be able to resuscitate the desktop PC!

## Friday 21 October 2016

I treated myself to a five-minute lie-in and got up at 6:40 this morning. I really tried to convince myself that there was no reason why I shouldn't stay in bed until 7 o'clock but some compulsion drove me to get up.



Today is my first weighing day since the 30 September, my last fasting week. The news was not good: up from 13 stone and three-quarters of a pound to 13 stone 4½ pounds – a gain of 3¾ pounds and the worst since I started the fasting at the end of the eight-week diet, when I weighed in at 13 stone 5¾ pounds. The actual weight isn't that bad compare with 14 stone 13¾ pounds (a quarter of a pound under the dreaded 15 stone) on the 2 March when we started the blood-sugar diet – still a loss of 22¾ pounds.

I started the walk at a brisk pace but was slightly delayed by explaining to a lady I often see at the bus stop why Bailey wasn't with me. Then I passed the postbox without posting Pat's two letters and had to loop back, so I probably lost about a minute and a half. The measured times were 14 minutes 40 seconds to the first field gate, 19 minutes exactly to the second and 37¼ minutes to home, all three less than a minute slower than yesterday.

Getting this laptop booted and running sensibly took ages, but when it had finally sorted itself out it seemed to be working fairly well. It is no substitute for my *real* computer, though!

Correction: it is still miserably slow at opening new programs and files. Once open, things work acceptably, to the extent that I have just managed (at 12:15pm) to update my bank-account spreadsheet – which I just notice has grown to almost 6000 rows! The good news is that the books are looking more balanced than they have for ages, even with £1200 gone to pay credit-card bills.

Chris Guest the PC doctor should be here in about 1½ hours. Fingers crossed for a quick result...

He actually turned up before 2pm and put on an impressive show of expertise. The worn-out battery turned out to be a common-as-muck CR2032 button cell, of which we use quite a few here! It is now 3pm, he has left with a well-earned cheque for £30 – only a fiver more than we pay our rather expensive window-cleaner when he does the inside of the conservatory as well as all the outsides (he was here this morning but we had to leave the inside so the bill was only £18). I am writing this on my fully functioning desktop machine rather than the lumbering laptop, and everything seems to be working properly and, above all, at a reasonable speed.

I had to turn on the laptop one more time, do an *Outlook* backup and copy that onto the rejuvenated desktop machine. This was not strictly necessary, but I would rather keep emails unnecessarily than lose some important. It was an eye-opener to watch the ancient laptop blundering its way through its share of the work and the much slicker desktop executing its share.

Reverting to the real focus of this diary, both feet felt fairly good after the walk this morning and still did at 4pm. Everything is working fairly well, for which I am profoundly grateful. Roasted chicken wings and leftover sauté potatoes, followed by strawberries, raspberries and very out-of-date cream for dinner – delicious.

## **Saturday 22 October 2016**

Although we were going to Buxton to repatriate Bailey (more later) I just had to fire up the PC and check that it was working properly. This was probably the first start-up since Chris's ministrations, so it wasn't a surprise that it took a while to get itself together.

When I fired the machine up at 6pm it started much more quickly and slickly.

Yesterday it was decided that Bailey was not coping well with his new situation. The vet and an animal behaviourist agreed that he was finding the bustle of the twice-daily school walk, and many aspects of this busy market town, difficult to cope with, and neither thought he was likely to adjust. This is deeply disappointing for all of us,

but we agreed that he would be much better off living the quiet life with us two old fogeys. As I write, having just refuelled on tea, crisps and biscuits (me, not the dog), he seems to be settling down to his old routine.

And, having composed and typed the last two paragraphs, I can confirm that the PC is much more like its normal self.

### **Sunday 23 October 2016**

In spite of going to bed fairly early feeling very tired, I couldn't get back to sleep properly after a 5am-ish pee. I really wanted to have a good long lie-in, but couldn't settle, so I got up at around 7:30am. Bailey had obviously settled perfectly for the night and was very excited to see me when I came downstairs. However, once I had sat down with a cup of tea he looked rather sad. He was wildly excited when his 'Dad', Aidan, arrived to do some painting for us, so Pat and I took him for a fairly long but leisurely walk to keep him out of the paint. This went well, and for the first time since he came to live with us we let him off the lead – on the deserted football pitch and had no trouble at all getting him back. He also had some fairly friendly doggy encounters while on the lead, and the anti-pull harness Julie had bought seemed to work fairly well.

Aidan was gone before 1pm and has promised to do the walls of the sitting room, which I had been intending to try, next weekend with Barney as assistant.

Bailey has really settled in well already. I think he is as relieved to be back as we are to have him back.

Tonight I am going to keep up the 'proper' food plan with a roast chicken Sunday dinner – leftover green veg plus carrots and lard-roasted so-called baking spuds from our local Co-op – much too grotty to bake. We found two containers of rice pudding in the freezer – delicious with Bonne Maman quince jelly...

### **Monday 24 October 2016**

I was up for a pee at around 3am and doubted whether I would manage to get back fully to sleep, but after various breathing exercises I must have gone off, because when I got up the next time it was around 6am. I waited for the 'chimes' of the expanding radiator and got up at 6:40, when I still managed a significant pee. Bailey was laid out on the sofa and, while he was mildly pleased to see me, he didn't get up straight away and when he did he couldn't be bothered to go outside. It must be one of the great mysteries of the universe that he can go without a pee all night and won't need one urgently in the morning, yet he manages to produce a short widdle every few minutes when we are out walking. By contrast, I am up three or four times a night, producing a reasonably-sized tiddle although I have never had more than a tiny sip of water.

Bailey was so lethargic that I thought he might not want to go for a walk, but as soon as I got back into my morning routine he got into his. When I went to the coat rack he got very excited, and we had a really silly few minutes getting him into his new harness (think I will have it figured next time!). By the time I had gone back from the door to put some poo bags and treats in my pocket, he was leaping all over the place. Nevertheless, he waited patiently for me to lock the door and start the stopwatch, and didn't pull at all when we set off.

The harness seems to have worked some real magic. The lead didn't get fully taut at any point on the walk. I didn't bother to switch the lead from one side to the other, and the harness still worked fine. Maybe he has walked with it enough in Buxton to be aware of the tug when he pulls and to ease off as soon as he feels it.

I was a little slower with the dog than without, but I don't think my main aerobic exercise of the day was seriously compromised. We passed the first gate in 14

minutes 45 second and the second in 19 minutes 39 seconds, finishing the walk in 19 minutes 39 seconds, so we were inside the 5-, 20- and 40-minute targets.

This diary is in danger of becoming more about our life with Bailey than about my ankles. So, just as a small update, I can report that both my feet were mildly painful when I went across the road for Anton's fags and milk before breakfast. The worst discomfort was in front of the left (fused) ankle, but it eased fairly quickly after a little relaxation.

While I was changing our beds I investigated the problem with the lifting headrest on my bed, which had fallen victim to my old overweight self and had become unusable a few weeks ago. I could see what the problem was. A bolt had torn itself right out of a piece of hardwood, depriving the lifting section of one of its two pivots. I would need to clean out the jagged hole and fix the head end of the bolt back in with Plastic Padding ' Chemical Metal'. I had ordered this a few days ago and received an email from Amazon promising delivery a week today, but it arrived this morning. I might have a crack at the repair tomorrow.

Pat went to see Anton this morning. I couldn't go because the chimney was being swept any time between midday and 3pm, but she has said she would take Bailey for a walk while the sweep was here. As it turned out he arrived at 12:10pm. Bailey was brilliant: after doing his usual barking and being a bit suspicious of the man in sooty overalls he made friends. He was desperate to stay in the sitting-room with the sweep but tolerated being shut out just while the mega-vac was working. I was really proud of him. Once the sweep had gone I vacuumed round, gave the room a spray of Oust to get rid of the sooty smell and then filled the log basket. All we need now is a little bit of winter!

We had cold chicken and pickle with warmed-up green vegetables, re-crisped roasties and gravy, which left enough breast meat for a curry tomorrow.

## **Tuesday 25 October 2016**

I woke up for a pee at about 6:10 this morning, with a vague recollection of an earlier visit sometime after 1:00am. This is the first really good night's sleep I have had since before we went to Cornwall. I had half an hour's laziness before getting up for the morning's walk.

The anti-pulling harness worked well again, but with poo-stops, rendezvous with other dogs and a quick explanation to a lady at the bus-stop whom I had told only a few days ago that Bailey had moved to Alistair's, the watch showed rather slower times: One minute one second longer than yesterday for the whole walk, 35 seconds longer to the first gate and 24 seconds longer to the second.

Most of the morning was spent doing my planned repair to my bed, which didn't go as well as I had hoped. The Plastic Padding hardened so quickly that I didn't have time to do as precise a job as I had hoped, and I will just have to see how things go tonight. Feeling virtuous once I had finished and cleaned up, I watched the final two episodes of season six of *Game of Thrones*. Having recently finished the last book, I found it hard to relate the TV series to it, but the two parts were really gripping, and it is going to be a long wait for season seven.

Later I checked Tempur warranty conditions and discovered that my attempts to prolong the life of my bed nullified it. I Googled Tempur adjustable bed repair and found plenty of people who could do it, but call-outs seem to start at around £75.

## **Wednesday 26 October 2016**

I was very weary last night after yesterday's efforts with my bed – and deeply disappointed when something gave way fairly violently as I raised the backrest. I didn't bother to investigate as I really did want to get my head down and it felt and

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sounded as if the whole repair had failed. I had another night of fairly continuous sleep, got up for a pee at something after 5am and then woke again from a deep sleep towards 6:30. I felt totally weary and very reluctant to get up, and lay there inventing an argument that said there was no need for me to get up so early, but I did toe and right ankle exercises and got up at 6:40.

Bailey seemed lethargic, too: he was curled up on my big leather recliner and, while he accepted a little petting, didn't bother to follow me through to the kitchen. He dragged himself through eventually, and we got off for our walk shortly after the 7 o'clock news. All three timings were slower than yesterdays, again, by five seconds at the first gate, 23 at the second and 44 for the whole walk. We had had a couple of other-dog encounters and a few aborted poo attempts, so these small margins weren't really significant. I started wondering whether recording all three timings is helpful when I have Bailey with me: the key test is to cover the whole route in under 40 minutes.

At bedtime I didn't bother investigating the bed. It was enough to know that the headrest was actually further out of line than it had been before I started yesterday's work. I was able to lean on it – just.

### **Thursday 27 October 2016**

I had another really good night's sleep, and when I woke up for a pee in the dark, thinking I would enjoy a little lie-in, I was annoyed to see that it was 6:37am. I seemed to have slept right through and had awakened at my programmed time. Bailey seemed reluctant to face the day, too, at least until I got the harness and tackle off the hook. Then he became the usual wildly excited monster I was used to.

We had a fourth pull-free walk, heading towards a beautiful red sunrise below a monster bank of black cloud. As planned yesterday I didn't make any effort to remember the time at the first gate – though I did notice that it was less than 15 minutes – but recorded times of 19 minutes 25 seconds at the second gate and 39 minutes 12 seconds at the end of the walk, showing that we were just 22 seconds slower on the in lap than on the out lap. The final time was the fastest of the week.

The legs and feet worked well and stayed substantially pain-free through the day.

We went to Aldi and then Sainsbury's to get stuff for the little Hallowe'en gathering we are having with Alistair's gang on Saturday.

I was feeling a bit strange after the walk, but not bad enough to stop me shopping. I had a bit of a headache and a woozy feeling. This came back later in the day and while watching TV in the afternoon I seemed to be dipping in and out of a dreaming state and coming back with strange ideas and images in my mind. I am used to this happening occasionally, but today it seemed to go on for a long time. I have been feeling pretty sleepy all afternoon, too. Maybe it is just fatigue from Tuesday's work on the bed, which really was exhausting.

### **Friday 28 October 2016**

I was very stiff and sore when I got out of my chair at the end of yesterday evening and still stiff when I got up this morning, but this soon eased, so I think I can probably manage on one Naproxen in the evening and two Paracetamol in the morning.

My run of good nights came to an end this morning. I got up for a pee at around 4:30 and didn't get right off to sleep again, in spite of my breathing exercises and being quite comfortable in bed. I considered try to grab an extra hour, but in the end got up at 6:35 as usual. I had had a cup of tea before I remembered that I was supposed to be weighing myself every Friday straight from the bathroom. I decided that a pee before the walk, the walk itself and then another pee would give me a pretty accurate result. If I was right, it was very encouraging (see below).

The sky was very like yesterday morning's, but it was quite a lot darker – so much so that I couldn't read the stopwatch at the first gate, so it is a good thing I decided to stop timing that target. We reached the second gate 20 minutes 1 second (faster than Tuesday and Wednesday but slower than Monday and Thursday) and finished the walk in exactly 40 minutes (faster than Wednesday but slower than all the other days). Bailey was a bit excitable this morning and kept wanting investigate various things – birds, I think, so there was a little moderate pulling but nothing Pat couldn't have managed.

I weighed myself as soon as we got back and I had had a pee. The result was exactly the same as last week's: 13 stone 4¼ pounds.

We went shopping at Aldi and Sainsbury's (yet again!) and through the afternoon did quite a lot of food preparation for tomorrow's gathering. I also called in at Wickes and got some bolt, nuts and washers to do a proper job of repairing my bed.

### **Monday 31 October 2016**

We had a really good time with Alistair, Julie and the boys on Saturday. Al and Julie went to visit Mr Straw's House, a rather strange National Trust property just down the road from here while Pat took the boys to the nearby tropical butterfly attraction. That left me in charge of catering. We had a mishmash of semi-party food, which all seemed to enjoy.

Yesterday was a pretty normal Sunday apart from adjusting to the end of British Summer Time. I spent a lot of the morning fixing my bed, and when I got into it at bedtime was delighted that the repair seemed to have worked really well.

It was good to get up in a bit of daylight this morning, although not much penetrated into the bedroom. It was even better to start our walk in full daylight, with a red sun just creeping over the horizon, and temperature at about 11 degrees. The walk was uneventful, with the harness still doing a great job, and we reached the second gate in 19 minutes and home in 38½, with me sweating quite a bit.

What was not good was to find that the digital radio aerial on our Panasonic mini-stereo was damaged and I couldn't get any reception at all of Radio 4, which made my early morning totally alien. After breakfast I did a bit of online research and then got my soldering out and made a new aerial out of some recycled speaker cable. It worked perfectly, so that was another technological triumph to join the repair of the bed.

I also got through a bit of online Christmas shopping for Pat, buying a very high-visibility digital clock for Anton, an Amazon gift voucher for nephew Nick's son Darwin and *The Guinness Book of World Records* for Ewan, all in about ten minutes flat.

Once that was done I remembered my routine Monday job of changing our beds – the smaller version this week, changing just one pillowcase and a bottom sheet on each bed.

Today has been gorgeously sunny, so at around 3pm I decided to give the lawn one last cut before winter. It was only this year that I discovered the most reliable way to start our Atco Admiral's Briggs & Stratton 4-stroke: two presses on the rubber priming pump and two brosk pulls on the recoil starter cord has fired the engine up reliably almost every time. And so it did today. The grass was pretty wet, but the Admiral made fairly short work of it and topped up our two composters nicely, finishing at 3.35 with a reasonable amount of daylight left for Pat to tidy up a bit. I was glad of a sit-down when the job was done!

I checked the bed later. It was working fine, but I tightened the nut on my newly-installed coach bolt and added a locknut to stop it working loose.

The really good news is that I have managed to mow regularly throughout the season with no serious protest at all from ankles, knees, back etc. Well..the back *has* complained, but the dodgy limbs have coped really well.

While I was preparing dinner, I switched the radio on and there was so much interference that I gave up and put my David Bowie compilation MP3 CD on.

## **Tuesday 1 November 2016**

I had a decent night's sleep, getting up at 4:40am for a pee but going straight back to sleep. After a brief drowsy spell I checked the time at 6:20am. When I got downstairs I found that the lights wouldn't work. A quick check with the torch revealed that one of the residual current devices had tripped, but it allowed me to reset it. It had obviously happened quite early because the dishwasher still had about 90 minutes of its programme left to run. By the time I had done my ablutions, reset the time on the cooker and microwave, and grabbed a cup of tea it was time to get walking. After yesterday's lovely weather it was disappointing to see a dreary grey sky and to feel a fine drizzle, but the temperature was about ten degrees in spite of forecasts of the first winter weather being on the way.

My feet had been feeling pretty battered when I went to bed last night, and I got up this morning with both lower legs feeling stiff and aching, but they loosened up once I got moving. After two good times yesterday I was really pleased to log a time 34 seconds faster than yesterday's at the second gate and to finish the walk in 1 minute 31 seconds less. I had quite a sweat on by the time I got home, but the legs and feet didn't feel bad at all.

Our new sofas will be arriving within the next two weeks so we decided to get started on decorating the sitting room. Aidan has painted the ceiling and we have the magnolia emulsion waiting, so today had to be the day. I contacted the dry cleaners to get the two sets of heavy curtains collected for cleaning and then took down the enormous net curtain from the front bow window. Then, using masking tape to avoid hours of precise cutting-in, I painted first the sides and then the ceiling of the window recess. I also cleaned the wooden sill with sugar soap in preparation for applying a fresh coat of dark oak sealer.

After a long period of fairly severe disability after my ankle fusion in September 2015, my confidence was pretty low, but I managed to get the first stages of the job done, though my right shoulder, still weakened by a long period with only one usable leg, made painting the window ceiling a left-handed job, though I still managed the vertical surfaces right-handed.

I am never going to be the DIY fanatic of a few years ago, but I felt good about myself and looked forward to tomorrow's tasks, starting with the windowsill.

By the time I had cleared up I was really ready for a big glass of red and Pat's delicious linguine with mozzarella, fresh tomatoes, basil and chilli.

And by the time I had done justice to that the fatigue really set in, and shortly after 9pm I took myself off to bed.

## **Wednesday 2 November 2016**

My hard work had earned me a good night's sleep, and I was delighted to see a bright sunny morning in stark contrast to yesterday's dreary weather. The outside thermometer was showing about four degrees, so I needed gloves and a sweatshirt under my fleece, though I did shed the gloves halfway back, when my circulation had got nicely pumped up. The brilliant low sun was dazzling, reducing visibility to zero when I was walking due East. On the main road, the wind was straight out of the north (a present from Doncaster!) and piercingly cold.

The walk was faster than Monday's but quite a bit slower than yesterday's, by 30 seconds at the gate and 50 seconds at the finish. Sweat level was quite high in spite of the cold and the feet felt a little bruised.

After breakfast I popped up to the local hardware shop for two small paint rollers, because yesterday's experience had convinced me that a wide one was heavy work for my wonky shoulder.

I taped round the window-sill and brushed the first new coat of sealer on. In spite of having washed it with sugar soap yesterday the sealer didn't seem to take very well – it produced a sort of dappled effect. The result of putting a spirit-based product on top of a water-based emulsion, perhaps...? I hoped a second coat would do better.

A long time later the sealer still had not lost its tackiness. I wondered whether it was a very old tin which we had inherited with the house. Meanwhile, I sorted out broekn and wobbly tie-back hooks for the curtains at the front of the house and got a coat of magnolia matt emulsion on the whole window wall and magnolia Woodsheen on the radiator (no – I don't know why they call it 'Woodsheen' and then say it is good for wood and metal, either!). By 4pm the job was done and I was pretty well knackered.

Both feet were aching quite badly from hopping up and down stepladders, so I was really glad to sit down with a cup of tea. After that, I put the room back together, and before dinner Pat ironed the enormous net curtain and threaded the extended rod into it. As the sill was only a little bit tacky I hooked the rod to the hooks on each side of the bow window, but I was unable to reach the other four hooks. I decided to take a chance, and put my kneeling pad on the sill to protect both the stain and my tender knees. I stepped down and lifted the pad gently. It only produced a very gentle ripping sound in one place and the finish looked none the worse. By bedtime it felt really dry.

### **Thursday 3 November 2016**

I had another really good night's sleep, waking for a pee at around 5am and catnapping from then on. When I roused myself fully the radiator was hot and my watch should 6.20. I enjoyed the last 15 minutes and got up at exactly 6:35. After all my contortions yesterday the legs felt a bit battered and stiff – like most mornings only more so.

After being made aware of my right shoulder's limitations with the roller and the brush yesterday I decided to get back into the routine of shoulder exercises, which I did with no real pain. In case I haven't mentioned it before, the trouble is concentrated at the outside end of the collar-bone, where it connects with the shoulder blade – technically the acromioclavicular joint, the acromion being the top bit of the scapula (shoulder-blade). It is obviously the joint that is damaged, so osteoarthritis yet again!

There was a lot of cloud this morning, but the temperature was on the wrong side of 5 degrees, so a sweatshirt and gloves were both needed. In spite of this I was quite sweaty after what felt like quite a strenuous walk. In fact, it was the slowest of the week so far, but faster than any day last week: 19 minutes 8 seconds at the second gate and 38 minutes 37 seconds at our front gate.

Pat and I really got stuck into the painting and by dinner time the front room was more-or-less finished. Just a little retouching will be needed tomorrow. I was relieved that the sealer on the windowsill had finally dried. The appearance is not perfect but at least it seems pretty robust. I may give it another coat soon – or not! Bailey's behaviour in the middle of all this activity was surprisingly good.

By the end of the day we were both totally whacked, but I managed to do a little filling around the kitchen chandelier as Aidan is coming to paint the ceiling on Saturday. I will have to give this a bit of a rub-down tomorrow.

It is a good thing we got this done because the new sofas will be delivered late next week. Before they arrive I intend to hire a Rug Doctor from the local Co-op and give the carpets a real deep clean.

Between all this I finally got round to booking a HomeServe engineer to sort out the leaking ball valves on our two loos. He will be coming on Tuesday.

### **Friday 4 November 2016**

I had a less restful night last night. I think I got up for pees before midnight and then at around 2:30, sleeping intermittently after that and up several times in the last hour or so – I think. It was raining at around 6 o'clock but by the time I got up it had stopped and the sky was clearing. It was quite a bit warmer than the last couple of days, with the temperature showing a little over five degrees.

My feet, ankles and knees were all feeling the effects of two days' decorating, which had really tested the effects of the last year on my agility and flexibility. This showed in the walk times: 20 minutes 10 seconds to the second gate and 40 minutes 35 seconds for the whole circuit.

I forgot my Friday weigh-in so I did it after the walk and a wee but before the post-walk cuppa. 13 stone 4¾ pounds, 2¼ pounds up on last week and only a pound and a quarter short of 13½ stone. If I hit that limit I intend to start the fasting again.

There was just some touching-up to do in the sitting-room today, so our bodies should have had a chance to recover a little, but when it came to it there was a fair lot of contortions to be gone through. And there was still the kitchen to be prepared for Aidan painting the ceiling tomorrow, which turned out to be more of a nightmare than we expected because the tops of the wall cupboards had accumulated an awful lot of greasy condensate which had then set like resin.

This had still not been dealt with when we were ready for dinner – fish and chips from the local chippie – so I picked up two bottles of degreaser from the local shop while I was out. About an hour after eating, we had finished. However, having shied away from the job and intending to wait for Aidan, I couldn't resist trying to take down the big ceiling fan in the kitchen. This involved taking out four tiny bolts and then...I didn't know! I had no idea how heavy the thing would be and whether I would be able to control it while teetering on a stepladder. I got the three bolts out and managed a complicated position in which my left elbow was wedged on the top of the ladder with the hand holding the fan while the right undid the last bolt. The fan was heavy but – fortunately – not as heavy as I thought it might be. It was left dangling on the live wire, the neutral and earth having pulled out of their terminal blocks. With Pat holding my big Maglite torch, I turned off the power and cut the last wire, managing to get myself and the fan down the ladder safely.

One bit of good news: the PC seems to have settled down after its recent problems and is now doing most jobs much more quickly than before.

My right shoulder was very sore by the time I got to bed, and the right ankle – the one with the 'catastrophic failure' of the implant – was very painful indeed: a sharp, piercing pain under the outside ankle bone, reminiscent of how it felt when I took it to hospital and got on Mr Milner's list for the replacement.

### **Saturday 5 November 2016**

To my great relief I woke with very little discomfort in either of the two troublesome joints. I know that exercise heats inflamed joints, but it seems that *extreme* exercise does, too!

After my success in removing the fan last night, Aidan managed to get the unwanted wires in their terminal blocks up into the ceiling cavity, and I mixed some stiff filler to



mask the holes. It wasn't dead flat but once painted over you didn't see it unless you knew it was there.

Barney announced on *WhatsApp* that he had released his first EP on iTunes and BandCamp. I managed to download it from BandCamp, paying £3 plus an extra couple of quid for the Boy Wonder, but it made the PC behave very strangely, because the default app for MP3 files turned out to be a Windows 10 horror called *Groove Music*. It took a lot of work by Aidan and me to make good old *Windows Media Player* the default, and a lot more research by me to find a way of uninstalling the abominable *Goove*.

Barney's EP is him moving on from the very ambient stuff he released under the name of Komorebi on *YouTube*. Very moody.

The kitchen ceiling was painted, but it is going to take a while to get the paper floral border off before we can do the walls. Meanwhile, most of the afternoon was spent cutting up old PVC tablecloths to line the tops of the cupboards so they won't get as greasy as they have this time. Once that was done quite a lot of the heavy kitchen gear could be put away.

### **Monday 7 November 2016**

Today was severely disrupted. Pat had to be at Bassetlaw Hospital for 7:30am for her Facet Joint Injections. I set the alarm on my phone for 6am but checked the time at 5:55, when she was already awake. This gave us loads of time to spare, so in the end we decided that she might as well get to the hospital searly rather than hang around here. I dropped her at just after 7am, came home for my breakfast and then got through various jobs.

I had decided to skip the walk for once because I rely on Pat being at home in case I have some sort of accident when I am out in the country.

First, as the temperature was barely above freezinng this morning I changedt the central heating programme from twice-a-day to all-day. Then I went upstairs, took the spring/autumn quilt out of the cover, got the summer one out of the loft, popped the two together and put them back in the cover. We haven't been cold in bed yet, but it seems that winter has snuck up on us. Next, I checked online to see if I could order my prescriptions as I have got out of step with Pat's: not yet, the GP site told me. Then I wrestled our potted olive tree up the step, over the threshold and into the conservatory. I split some logs and brought them in to fill the basket, cleared the grate of ashes and laid the fire ready for this evening. For light relief I did my usual admin jobs on the PC – bank account check, purging my email inbox of the vast amount of junk mail it collects every day and so on. Finally, I put masking tape on the back corner of the sitting-room chimney breast where the cutting in had been a bit clumsy and ran a brushload of magnolia down it.

At that point I decided that I deserved a sit-down and made some fresh coffee. I had just taken the first sip – literally – when the phone rang. It was Pat, ready to be collected.

She needed looking after for two days, according to the hospital – not something she takes kindly to – so we had a lazy day together, watching several episodes of *Mafiosa*, the new French thriller series I found on All4. I lit the fire before dusk, so we had a really cosy evening.

### **Tuesday 8 November 2016**

I was back in the routine this morning. Bailey and I did our usual walk in a low, red sun and a temperature of one or two degrees but, thankfully, virtually no wind. We clocked 19 minutes 37 seconds at the gate and 39 minutes 29 seconds for the whole walk.

I was annoyed to find Pat up when we got back, but there had been a phone call which she couldn't get to in time to answer and she thought it might be the HomeServe plumber. I did a 1471 call-back and this turned out to be true. He arrived a few minutes later and we now have new ball-valves in both loos.

I struggled to keep Pat from doing stuff all morning, but by coffee time she had settled. Perhaps the stress of yesterday's hospital visit was telling. I have been feeling pretty whacked-out, too – perhaps the result of last week's decorating efforts.

She started doing silly things later and simply would not accept that she should not bend and twist. I just hope she hasn't undone the medics' good work.

### **Wednesday 9 November 2016**

There was lots of rain on the en-suite window when I got up during the night but it was quite light when I got up, with the temperature not far above zero. Bailey and I decided to go out anyway, but the usual route along the lane was a non-no – a stretch of at least 30 metres was totally under water. So we carried on along the almost unused road until the watch hit 20 minutes, and then headed back without looping into the lane to check the flood again, getting home in 37 minutes 40 seconds.

I went into town to pay a heavy bill for dry-cleaning the sitting-room curtains and to collect a new washing-up bowl bought on Ebay on click-and-collect from Argos – a really good way of getting your stuff home. A visit to Darren the fishmonger, a fairly brief one to Aldi and an even briefer one to Sainsbury's saw me home just after 11am, gagging for coffee.

The afternoon was spent sorting out the curtains which came back from the cleaners yesterday afternoon. I think the less said about that the better. It ended with Pat and myself managing to bath Bailey for the first time since we have had him. He was reluctant, but behaved really well.

### **Thursday 10 November 2016**

I was up to the loo several times through the night and there was rain on the window every time. It had stopped by the time I dragged myself – reluctantly because my two goose-down pillows and our goose-down four-seasons duvet (now upgraded to its full winter weight) made such a light and cuddly nest. However, my dedication to routine prevailed, and when I got downstairs I found that the outside temperature was around five degrees, a critical five higher than yesterday. More importantly, the rain had stopped.

Bailey was a little subdued this morning but perked up when the time came to put on his harness. He still wasn't his usual deranged self before the walk but he took off with his usual enthusiasm. I guessed that the lane would still be under water, so we took the reverse route on the many little footpaths through the sub urban estate and round the football field. I made the route as long as possible but we were home in just over 30 minutes.

We concluded later in the morning that Bailey had sprained his tail. It happened while he was with Alistair's family and it seems to have happened again. He cannot sit down at all. The vet's advice was not too much walking and plenty of rest. He rests most of the day anyway!

We were expecting our new sitting-room furniture to arrive between midday and 3pm so we spent quite a while preparing, including bullying our heavy leather 3-seater into the conservatory for Aidan to take to his new place. In the end we got an apologetic phone-call to say that the delivery would be a little late. The van arrived before 3:30pm so we couldn't really complain. The two guys were great, and Pat is thrilled with the look and comfort of the two sofas and the long footstool. We are going to jhave to

find ways of protecting the upholstery from Bailey, because Pat loves to have him lying beside her.

I also spent time preparing the kitchen walls for their first coat of fresh paint. We haven't chosen a colour yet, so I am going to use the 'soft white' which Alistair and Julie used in our bedroom and the office when they did the insurance job. At least that will look clean and will be a good undercoat for whatever we eventually choose.

### **Saturday 12 November 2016**

We did the normal walk yesterday morning, the puddles having subsided, in a fairly average 37 minutes 28 seconds.

Most of the rest of the day was devoted to masking tape and emulsion paint in the kitchen, interspersed with the fun of getting our old three-seater leather sofa out. It was a tighter fit than the new ones, but Aidan and I, and eventually his man with a van, eventually got it out and on the road.

By the end of the day I had most of the really fiddly stuff in the kitchen painted - the walls around the back door, the large adjoining window, the bookcase and the door into the hall. It was a tricky job because I was using the soft white over dirty brilliant white and it was difficult to keep track of where I had painted. By the end of the day my ankles, knees, back and right shoulder were really giving me gyp.

I was looking forward to a lie-in this morning, but it was somewhat spoiled by being intermittently away after my first pee at around 4am. However, I brought up a tray of tea at around 7:45 and we took our time about getting up.

Initially I thought about taking the day off from painting, but in the middle of the afternoon I decided to do some more. By 5pm there was only about an hour's worth left to do tomorrow, and my joints felt a lot less painful than they did yesterday.

Getting these jobs done has been a real boost to my confidence after the long period of feeling 'disabled' after the last ankle surgery. I know I am not as flexible, agile and even strong as I was a few years ago, but I am managing a lot more challenging stuff.now.

### **Monday 14 November 2016**

I finished the first coat of paint in the kitchen yesterday. This part of the job was complicated by my having to pull the huge fully-laden fridge out, wipe down the wall behind it and mop the revealed floor. The last bit, to the right of the fridge, involved more fiddly cutting-in than anything else.

I had a decent night's sleep after staying up until after midnight to watch the Brazilian Grand Prix, though I was lying awake worrying about one or two things from around 5:30am.

It was a dull, damp morning with an amazing ten degrees on the thermometer and a peak of fourteen forecast for later. Unfortunately it is forecast to be cloudy all day, to the 'supermoon' probably won't be visible.

Bailey and I walked the usual route (no sweatshirt, no gloves!) without any 'close encounters', getting round in 37 minute 16 seconds.

We went to Homebase in Sheffield in the mid-morning, and chose paint for a second coat in the kitchen and the hall wainscoting (the bit with the Anaglypta below the dado rail). We bought some new brushes and more masking tape, plus a curtain rod for the bedroom and a mud-absorbing doormat for the kitchen. Amazingly, this lot totted up to nearly £90 – scary.

Amazingly the temperature reached exactly fourteen degrees and we actually did see the supermoon. It was very bright, but didn't seem much bigger than usual.

## Tuesday 15 November 2016

I was up at 4:30am for a pee and just couldn't get back to sleep. I had a couple of things to worry about and couldn't let go. I was still awake when the radiator chimed at 6 o'clock and was quite glad when the clock hit 6:40.

It was a very warm morning, the temperature having hardly dropped at all overnight from its unseasonal high. However, it was very damp underfoot. The mud on the lane was very wet and rather slippery, and Bailey made this a three-poo walk. We reached the halfway mark in 19 minute 5 seconds but all the messing about meant that I didn't get a final time, so I logged twice the first time.

Pat had a fortnight's accumulation of ironing to do, having given the washing-machine and tumble-dryer a good hammering yesterday.

I had what seemed like an inspirational idea about the blasted DAB radio aerial. I would get one of the many TV aerial leads which I have accumulated, mostly from the accessory packs with older computers, and attach the connector I have been using, unsuccessfully, for most of the past couple of weeks. This would allow me to try various wire antenna configurations and locations around the corner where the Panasonic stereo lives. I spent the whole morning on this, first reviving a crummy old soldering iron by sawing the copper bit off and filing it down. It was very difficult to unsolder the connections from the plug and solder the coaxial cable's core and screen to it, but I got varying levels of success through the day – though none to my complete satisfaction, so in the end I ordered an amplified DAB aerial from Amazon, which should arrive tomorrow, along with a decent soldering iron.

The day was uneventful, with tomorrow's visit to Worksop market to look forward to..

## Wednesday 16 November 2016

My amazing internal alarm clock let me down this morning after my first really decent night's sleep in ages. I was woken by the emptying of wheelie-bins and was amazed to see that it was 6:53am! I got up immediately, feeling much fresher than usual, and came downstairs feeling some real enthusiasm for the day.

As the mornings have become darker I have been wondering whether I could somehow break my incredibly rigid habit pattern and start getting up at around 7 o'clock. Was this morning my system trying this out?

It was a bright and breezy Autumn morning with the temperature at about ten degrees. I had to put up with the cheap kitchen TV's rather tinny rendering of Radio 4 (thanks heaven for digital TV) while I got myself and Bailey ready for the walk.

As we approached the lane I saw a man with two dogs in the distance. It looked like the opinionated local with whose dogs Bailey had a difficult encounter early in September, so we stayed on the road. I thought I would try the alternative lane, which has no tarmac but a fairly firm stony surface. It was quite good, with a few puddles and not too much mud, so we walked up that until we hit the 20-minute mark and were back in about 40 minutes (my stopwatch management had failed again!).

On the way back I realised that I could see the 'supermoon', high above the horizon but not very obvious against the pale blue of the sky. The surface features were definitely clearer than usual, so I was quite pleased with the sighting. We also had strong and chilly winds against us, but this was quite 'bracing'.

I went into town after breakfast, getting 500-or-so extra metres of uphill walking to reach Darren's fish stall and another 500 downhill back to the car.

I spent most of the morning removing the brass curtain rod at our bedroom window and installing the slightly more ornate one which Pat bought at Homebase on Monday. This turned out to be more of a job than we expected. First, the window is

above our bedhead so the beds had to be moved. The Tempur beds and mattresses are incredibly heavy, as is the blanket box at the foot of the beds. That had to be dragged further down the room first, and then my mattress had to be rolled over onto Pat's bed – quite a job because the memory-foam mattresses themselves are pretty weighty. Then I could drag the bed down to meet the blanket box, also quite a job because of the two motors and two gearboxes under each bed. That gave me about half a metre of working space in front of the window. Once the old rod was down, I discovered that the new one had twiddly brass finials (think that's what they are called) which add about 100mm to each end of the rod. This meant that the rod needed to be quite a lot lower than the other one to gain length under the sloping ceiling. That in turn meant drilling and plugging into the wall which, unlike most of hours, was very hard once I got through the plaster. I got the brackets installed and then vacuumed up the dust and wiped the sill, leaving Pat to install the rod. Finally, I had to wrestle the beds and the blanket box back into position. The finials on the rod were not just long – they were heavy too, and Pat managed to break the glass shade on my bedhead light with one of them. She then spent most of the rest of the day with her sewing machine, making the new curtains.

Later in the day I realised that my trainers – and possibly Bailey's feet – had brought in more mud than I thought. The bits left on the carpet were too damp to vacuum up, so I decided to leave them until tomorrow.

The DAB radio aerial and my new soldering iron arrived during the afternoon, but I didn't have time to play because Andy Murray's three-setter at the O2 turned out to be a marathon.

#### **Thursday 17 November 2016**

My lie in yesterday was not repeated. I woke up sometime after 5am and didn't get back to sleep, though my breathing exercise seemed to keep me fairly relaxed and my mind off life's tribulations. I allowed myself a short lie-in, getting up just after 6:45. This meant that I didn't get into the bathroom until after the news headlines (I didn't hang on for the whole bulletin as there was nothing momentous going on).

It was another lovely bright morning, but Google told me that the local temperature was just four degrees – six lower than yesterday's. I started out wearing gloves but didn't bother to put them back after poo-bagging. We reached the gate in 19 minutes 20 seconds and completed the walk in 39 minutes 9 seconds, slowed down by a couple of amicable encounters with other dogs and, towards the end, my slightly weary legs and feet.

I spent much of the morning trying to get the DAB aerial to work, and it seemed not to be much more reliable than my various bits of flex. I finally got a just-acceptable result with the aerial behind the TV on top of the fridge, so I switched to the heavy Sebo vacuum cleaner. First Pat and I 'hoovered' the dog, who seemed really to enjoy both the upholstery nozzle and the soft dusting brush and came up looking very shiny. Then I did the new furniture and vacced round the whole of downstairs, finishing just in time for lunch and then the tennis.

Djokovic versus Goffin was short, sharp and not really worth watching, so I went back to the DAB aerial, and by teatime I had given up. Either my much-loved Panasonic stereo is knackered or the radio signal in our kitchen has deteriorated severely. It looks as if I am going to be stuck with the tinny telly.

I got an extra 10 or 15 minutes' walk in today, taking a parcel up to the local Post Office for return to Amazon. If I had realised how awkward the big box would be I would have taken the car, and if I had anticipated the icy wind I would, too. But I walked, and felt really virtuous as a result!

I was disappointed that the radio signal seemed to have got worse and more-or-less resigned myself to sticking with the TV for my listening.

### **Friday 18 November 2016**

A very odd morning, this one. First, after a mostly restful sleep, I looked at my watch and saw that it was 7:15am – 40 minutes late! I felt quite groggy when I got up, but decided to see if moving around would revive me. By the time I got downstairs and had been greeted with Bailey's usual enthusiasm I was beginning to feel a little more human, though I was slightly shivery.

The good news – and a real surprise – was my weight: 13 stone 4½ pounds, 2¼ pounds *lighter* than my last weight taken two weeks ago and the same as the previous two weeks immediately after I stopped the fasting diet. So, in spite of eating fairly normally, though I seem to have broken my old 'piggy' habits, my weight seems to have stabilised fairly well, which is really good news.

The ground was damp when I looked out, with the temperature at around two degrees. I went for my favourite windproof fleece with a nice fleecy Slazenger sweatshirt underneath. The rain was quite light, but when I turned the corner onto the Doncaster road I could see a very ominous, almost black, sky to the north. I decided to settle for the half-hour walk, turning at the first field gate in 14 minutes 35 seconds. By then a little wet snow was beginning to fall, easily penetrating my two-week-old buzz-cut, so I was very glad to reach home, feeling quite chilled, with the watch showing 29 minutes 25 seconds. After towelling my head thoroughly, I gave the soggy doggy a good rub-down.

My left heel (the one below the fused ankle) has been aching quite a lot this week and was protesting gently during and after the walk. However, I am fairly pleased with the way my one bad knee and two dodgy ankles are performing, allowing me to achieve most of what I want without too much distress.

I was feeling distinctly under the weather by the time we had finished breakfast, and was glad to see that Andy would be playing the formidable Stan Wawrinka this afternoon – a good excuse for a lazy time.

Pat went round for a coffee with her best friend Sue. I felt better after two beautifully brewed mugs of coffee (though I say it myself) and a couple of Belgian spiced biscuits, with two short science documentaries on TV, so I went out and split a couple of nice red spruce logs into sensible sizes for kindling with my trusty felling axe. Then I cleared the gate, emptied the ashes (not many from two or three nights with a fire), laid the fire with screwed up *Sunday Times* (best use for it in my biased opinion), used wet kitchen roll and ash to clean the glass in the stove's door and then the handheld Vax to clean up the few ashes I had spilt on the hearth. Finally, I emptied and cleaned the Vax.

Before lunch, while Pat was out, I went online and bought her (probably) main Christmas present: something she hasn't had before to make her even more fragrant.

We decided to try a teakeaway from a new India restaurant in the neighbouring village. This was supposed to arrive between 6:45 and 7 o'clock, but in spite of me phoning the restaurant at 7:15 it didn't arrive until 7:35. It turned out to be quite the worst Indian meal either of us had ever had – so bad that much of it ended up going back in the bag and then into the bin

### **Monday 21 November 2016**

We went to Retford farmers' market on Saturday morning to stock up on organic farmhouse cheeses, Dexter beef and various other 'essentials'. The afternoon was devoted to Djokovic/Nishikori, the Serb having a much easier match than Andy's with the Japanese opponent. Pat cooked two huge ox cheeks (Dexter!) with dumplings,

while I did 800 grams of mash and a jug of my special custard. We skipped lunch – an increasingly frequent happening here, which may help to explain my keeping the weight off – and had dinner at 5pm, ready for the O2 final at 6 o'clock. Andy seemed to be having a fairly easy run through the first set and the beginning of the second, but the Serb made a late recovery which had us seriously worried. Nevertheless, the last of too many unforced errors by Djokovic resolved the suspense and our Scottish hero finished his triumphant season with a real peak – a phenomenal record of match and tournament wins and finishing as world number one.

I tried to delay getting up this morning but my bladder, which had had me up and down far too many times in the early hours, got me out of bed at 6:50. It was raining lightly and – according to Google – just two degrees, so I opted for my cagoule over a fleece. The rain was getting heavier by the time we set out, so I decided to do just the half-hour circuit. Bailey and I were both very wet indeed when we got back. I fumbled the stopwatch because of my gloves, but I reckon we were pretty close to 30 minutes. The rain was forecast to continue all day.

I had some of my last batch of sourdough bread for lunch. I defrosted it in the Panasonic microwave using chaos defrost and then gave it five minutes in the microwave's convection over and 200°C. The crust was good and crunchy, but something wasn't right. I have had doubts about this batch for a while. The texture was excellent, but the taste and feel in the mouth left a lot to be desired. I wonder if my culture has finally lost its way. I might try making a ferment and sponge based on commercial yeast next time. I will be sad if the sourdough has to go, as I have had great service from the culture I brought back from my course at the Artisan Cookery School nearly six years ago.

It was still raining, not very hard but persistent, when we had a cup of tea at around 4pm.

More braised ox cheek, dumplings, mash and cabbage tonight, followed by more stewed plums (from our tree) and my creamy custard.

## **Tuesday 22 November 2016**

I was woken at around midnight by a strange rhythmic scraping noise. Bailey had been a little put out by our going to bed, so I wondered if he was expressing his disgruntlement by scratching at the carpet – or, much worse, the new sofas. I went downstairs and found nothing out of order, and managed to get back to sleep quite quickly. I had no recollection of getting up to the loo when I finally did so just before 6:30am, and I decided to go back to bed and get up in time for the 7 o'clock news. The main headline? Donald Trump would like Nigel Farage as the UK's ambassador to the USA! The world gets madder by the day...

It was raining very lightly, but after yesterday's deluge I decided that the lane, and probably the whole of the lowest-lying neighbourhood, would be under water, so I opted for the footpaths behind our road and the football pitch, though I thought that would be totally waterlogged. In fact it was surprisingly firm, and we did the walk in 28½ minutes and were pretty wet when we got home as the rain had increased again.

My right ankle – the one with the defunct implant – was quite painful yesterday, but it was fine again this morning, even *after* the walk. I have been going up and down the stairs quite happily lately in spite of the right knee having played up after the decorating. So the orthopaedic problems which are the main reason for this diary are really not problems at the moment.

My main problem lately has been DAB radio reception in the kitchen. It was working fine until fairly recently but no more. I have tried home-made wire aerials and a commercial amplified one, with no success. I have concluded that either the

Panasonic stereo has developed a fault (unlikely) or we have done something to upset reception – more ironmongery around the kitchen and utility room (more likely). Either way, I am sick of listening to Radio 4 on the tinny telly, so I thought I would switch from DAB to FM. I don't have the original FM antenna that came with the stereo so I did a bit of Googling this morning and found a really helpful article: <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-an-FM-Antenna>. I had a look at the back of the stereo and went back to my boxes of old cables in the garage to find a lead designed to connect ancient computers to ancient TVs. (During the search I did find the original AM loop aerial, but I don't think I'm that desperate!) I cut the lead in half and put the piece with the male co-ax connector back in the box. Then I made a T-shaped antenna out of twin flex (actually Sony speaker cable) and insulating tape with the crossbar exactly 478mm long, which would tune the antenna to the middle of the BBC's 88-108Mhz FM band. With my new soldering iron I connected this to the aerial cable, taped it discreetly to the wall behind the stereo, plugged it into the FM antenna socket and switched on, expecting to have to tune the preset stations. Imagine my delight when, at just before 11am, Radio 4 came in loud and clear, as did 2 and 3 when I pressed the relevant buttons. I must have set the stereo up for FM before I started using DAB. I do *love* it when I solve yet another problem!

Bailey got lucky in the afternoon when Pat decided to take him up to the Post Office to post some letters. He was pretty weary by the time they got back. He had had an encounter with a young boy who spent quite a while petting him.

### **Wednesday 23 November 2016**

I didn't wake up during the night, but went to the loo at 5:20am. I managed to get a little sleep at least after that, finally getting up shortly before 7. I felt distinctly fresher than I have been feeling when getting up at around 6:30. Radio 4 FM – lovely!

I had had quite a bad nosebleed before going to sleep – a rare event for me and about the worst I could remember since I was a child, when I had horrendous ones that necessitated calling the doctor out. I ended up plugging the right nostril with screwed-up toilet-roll paper, and when I was ready to stop reading I took this out. The bleeding had stopped and obviously hadn't started again while I was asleep.

It was a mild, bright morning – a pleasant relief after the rain of the last few days. I decided to go down the hill to see if the low-lying part of the village was navigable, and was surprised to find that the lane was okay – plenty of big puddles but with dry routes between them. We did the full route, reaching the second gate in 19 minutes 22 seconds and completing the walk in 39 minutes 2 seconds with no stop-water glitches.

I was very hot and sweaty when we got back, and just before breakfast my nose started bleeding again, more copiously than last night. I had to plug it with cotton wool, and when I took this out it started again. I re-plugged it and ate my breakfast, and left the plug in for most of the morning. When I took it out, it looked horrible, soaked in blood with a thick clot at the business end. However, I hadn't had another bleed by 1pm, so I just needed to avoid blowing my nose, which with me is always a high-energy process making a noise like a steamship whistle. My head was feeling heavy and aching so I took two Paracetamol at lunchtime.

We had a clear-out of two kitchen cupboards to check what Christmas cake and pudding ingredients we have in stock, and I tried to rearrange the stereo wiring to make it tidier but failed.

I also started a 'ferment' using Allinson's quick-acting yeast and extra-strong white bread flour, in an attempt to establish a yeast-based culture which I could keep active and use like the sourdough. The mix seemed drier and more elastic than I am used



to with the sourdough, but fermentation went off like a volcano, far more vigorous than with the sourdough.

Before bed I made my sponge, with 300 grams of lukewarm water, 300 grams of the ferment (leaving 100 for the 'stash') and 300 of flour.

I had no more nosebleeds through the day and evening. I left off my steroid nose spray and was very careful when blowing my nose.

### **Thursday 24 November 2016**

I was going to do the big shop for Christmas cakes and puddings, sausage rolls and mince pies this morning, but Pat's friend Sue had suggested a shopping trip to Rotherham (yes, *that* Rotherham), which is only a few miles up the road, and we were still waiting for items ordered online to be delivered. As 'the girls' were setting off at 9:30, my plan needed a rethink.

I managed to relax in bed, after at least three loo trips) until I just has time to get downstairs for the 7 o'clock news. I took Pat a cup of tea to help her get ready for her jaunt. It was a chilly but dry morning – about four degrees – so Bailey and I had a pleasant walk apart from a couple of slightly snappy encounters with other dogs. We did the standar route, reaching the field gate in 19 minutes 12 seconds and completing the walk in 41 minutes 29 seconds (problems with the stop-watch again!).

As soon as I got back I stirred 300 grams each of water and flour into my sponge, then got breakfast on the way. I was very dubious about the consistency of my dough, but as I went through the usual routine it turned into something very similar to the usual sourdough one, but if anything with a better texture. I reduced the olive oil from the 200ml of the last sourdough batch to 150ml, and didn't add the final 50 grams of flour because the dough was noticeably stiffer than the last one. At midday it was looking and feeling really great, and I set the timer for the one-hour prove. By 12:30 the dough had increased considerably in bulk and was soft enough to spread across the bottom of the bowl rather than grow upwards. Maybe I would manage to stretch it to fill my focaccia tins...

In fact, it was murder to handle, but not too sticky, so I managed to cut it into three large portions and each of those into eight small ones, weighing everything to get the sizes as even as possible. I baked two trays for 25 minutes and then the third for the same time. All three batches of rolls were on cooling racks by 4.45pm. The tasting will be at lunchtime tomorrow.

### **Friday 25 November 2016**

I had a restful night, getting up for a pee sometime around 6am and again at 6:30. I went back to bed and snoozed, getting up at 6:50 feeling quite fresh. For me that rates as a really good night's sleep.

The second good news was my weight. In spite of not dieting but definitely eating less lately, I have lost another three-quarters of a pound, tipping the scales at 13 stone 3¾ pounds. I have put 6½ pounds back on since the amazing 30-pound weight loss recorded on the first of July but have still achieved a 23½-pound total loss since the start of the eight-week blood sugar diet.

It was dry and still this morning, with the temperature at six degrees. We had a pleasant, uneventful walk, reaching the second gate in 18 minutes 56 seconds and completing the walk in 38 minutes 35 seconds.

The third good – no, *excellent* – was that my no-sourdough bread was really good, with a lovely light, open crumb and a fairly crisp crust. I defrosted one roll naturally for myself and later one in the microwave for Pat. Natural was definitely best. So that

is the end of my long relationship with sourdough, but I will stay with Emanuel's method. It will be interesting to see what the ferment will be like after a month in the fridge.

My main task for the day was to go and buy everything Pat needs for her Christmas bake. After breakfast, I phoned out favourite butcher halfway between here and Doncaster and ordered 2kg of sausage meat to collect later. I added one of their excellent quiches for Pat to take to Anton on Monday. I was at Sainsbury's at around 9:30 and didn't get out until 11 o'clock. The trolley was barely controllable on the sloping car-park and the bill was well over £100. To be fair I had added quite a few items that were nothing to do with the bake, including chicken wings and potatoes for tonight's dinner. I drove up to the butcher to collect the sausage meat and quiche and then home.

I had already checked that our village Co-op had not yet started selling Robertson's excellent mincemeat, and when I checked at Sainsbury's I found that they, too, had only their own brand. Once home and unloaded, I Googled the product and found it all over the Tesco website, so later in the afternoon I went to our local Tesco. Having seen only their own brand on display, I asked one of the staff for what I wanted. She found it about 20 feet down the aisle – weird! Worse, there were only three jars. I had to pass the small out-of-town Asda on the way home, so I decided to drop in there. They had five jars, which I thought would probably give us enough!

The knee and ankle had stood up to all this supermarket stuff and later cooking the 800-odd grams of wings and the potato wedges, which went down really well with mayonnaise and red wine.

## **Monday 28 November 2016**

I got up early on Saturday in preparation for a visit to the Buxton gang, but a call to Alistair revealed that Alistair and the others were still unwell. As neither of us was feeling on top form, with some vague respiratory bug, Pat accepted that it would be foolish to go. I was relieved, first because I was feeling rough and second because I really wanted to watch the last qualifying of this Formula One season. I was able to watch this and Sunday's Grand Prix live. Lots of suspense, so a fitting end to a tense season. It would have been good to see Hamilton get a fourth championship, but I am sure he will try harder next year.

Pat ran herself ragged making Christmas cakes and puddings, but got them all done by the end of yesterday.

I managed to stay in bed until 6:50 this morning. It was a pleasant morning. With thin high cloud and a beautiful red sunrise developing as we were walking back, though at two degrees it felt pretty chilly. The poo bags I bought from Sainsbury's last week were far better than the miserable little item's I've been using for ages – a lot bigger and a little bit thicker. It was a glove morning, and this caused a hiccup with the stopwatch. I timed the walk home from the second gate at 19 minutes 56 seconds and doubled that for the whole walk on the spreadsheet.

This morning, with more than a little regret, I consigned my sourdough stash to the bin. I put one of the new rolls in a basket to defrost naturally and two slices of Warburtons' white sliced in a ziploc bag to defrost for Pat's lunch I also brought in some more logs and laid the fire ready for the forecast cold evening. My new firelighting technique for the woodburner works as follows: tear double pages of *The Sunday Times* into singles and screw each up into a fairly tight ball. Use one like a sponge to clear the grate – much more effective than the poker. Then pack them three deep to cover the grate and put three or four thin logs – about an inch to an inch and a half thick – on top. Light at each end and in the middle and play with the dampers until the wood has caught.

Pat spent the middle of the day at Anton's. I did my usual Monday morning admin and watched the new episode of *Planet Earth II* while she was out.

I got a small box of butter chicken curry (leftover chicken and Patak's super sauce – how hard is that?) out and defrosted it. I found a bag with three of my most recent attempts at home-made naan breads and took one out to defrost. This would be heated in a dry iron skillet while the Uncle Ben's long-grain rice was boiling.

Once I had lit the fire, at around 3pm, I began to feel really drowsy – not unusual these days – so I read until I dozed off.

## **Tuesday 29 November 2016**

I persuaded myself to stay in bed until 6:45 this morning, and went down to see the garden with its first hard frost under a clear blue sky with a touch of red in the East. Google gave our local temperature as -1 degrees and our outside thermometer showed -2.

When we got out, I realised (thought) that I had not changed into my muddy trainers, so I decided to avoid the muddy lane and took the loop round behind our houses with a lap of the football pitch. I had to restrain Bailey to avoid a fight at one point but the walk was uneventful otherwise. I got in a tangle on one poo-stop with the bag, my gloves, the lead and the stopwatch, so I recorded an estimate, possibly a little generous, of 30 minutes for the whole walk. In spite of the cold I was sweating when I got home – which was when I discovered that I *had* changed my shoes!

I made yet another visit to the Co-op after breakfast to pick up even more food essentials, and before lunchtime we decided to do a dash to a shop on the Wentworth estate near Rotherham to pick up no less than *three* Lampes Berger as Christmas presents for various of younger members of our families. The brilliant and very low sun was a nightmare, and I felt that we only avoided several pile-ups by the skin of our teeth, even with Polaroid clip-ons over my glasses.

By 4pm the wood-burner was laid and lit, ready for another very cold night. For a change, dinner was breakfast – bacon, eggs, sauté potatoes, mushrooms etc.

## **Wednesday 30 November 2016**

The weather forecaster said that today is the last day of 'meteorological autumn', which is odd because it turned out to be the second consecutive frosty morning for us, which would have made yesterday the first of winter. This morning started clear, dry and cold (around zero) with a few streaks of cloud and another red sunrise. We did the full 'forty-minute route', for a change in exactly 40 minutes. The mud on the lane was frozen hard but there was no ice underfoot, which were the best conditions for walking we had had for a while.

Before lunch I finally got round to touching up the paint on our black-iron kitchen chandelier, made many years ago by a blacksmith in Normandy. The little 'rose' that covers the wiring had not been painted and re-fixed since Aidan painted the kitchen ceiling, but looked a great deal nicer after this morning's work.

We each had one of my new yeast-based rolls for lunch, and Pat waxed positively enthusiastic about hers (she had never liked the sourdough version). The rolls themselves are a bit unwieldy, so I think I will reduce their size slightly – perhaps put ten rather than eight in a tray, which would reduce the average weight per roll from about 85 grams to around 70. I am thinking about serving the new rolls to our guests on Boxing Day, so I will need to bake a few extra batches and get them frozen. I need to refine my shaping technique, perhaps working the rolls with wet hands.

Later I tried to buy SuperGlue and EvoStik at our local village hardware shop and learned to my disgust that they were having to close down because of competition

from online shopping and the recently opened branch of ScrewFix in town. That leaves one real old-fashioned ironmonger's shop within easy reach.

All the silly bits of my skeleton have been behaving quite well so far this week.

### **Thursday 1 December 2016**

A milder and much gentler morning today with the temperature at about six degrees. Our walk was on the 40-minute route again, and took 40 minutes and 19 seconds, almost exactly the same as yesterday.

Pat got off on her three-girl jaunt before 9am, and I spent the rest of the day watching three Bond movies including the latest, *Spectre*, which was a pretty standard formulaic tale ending in the usual explosions, fire and mayhem. Later I watched a two-hour documentary about a recent Stones tour of South and Latin America, including Cuba – great stuff as usual. This was followed by *Bowie at the BBC* and then bed.

### **Friday 2 December 2016**

It was six degrees again this morning. I decided not to go off into the wilds without Pat reachable on the phone, so we did a 32½-minute walk up to the top of the village by the main road and back through the council estate. My nose started bleeding before we left, so I plugged the offending nostril with a rolled-up cottonwool pad, which was still damply bloody round the edges when we got back. I didn't risk taking the plug out until around 11am, by which time the bleed seemed to have stopped, and my nose managed to run gently without triggering more bleeding.

I spent an hour from around 11 o'clock watching the amazing documentary about the making of Paul Simon's astounding *Graceland* album, which gave a tremendous insight into its cultural and musical complexity. Paul was on the London folk scene when I was and we were on nodding terms as floor singers, and I remember congratulating him on his first album in the queue for the Les Cousins all-night club – and Art Garfunkel's difficulty in coping the competition for Paul's attention. That was long after a girl whom I had offered a drink in another club fended me off with 'I'm Paul Simon's girlfriend' – she was the Kathy of *Kathy's Song*! Mrs Marsden II and I went to the NEC for the *Graceland* concert at the height of the apartheid crisis in South Africa. So the documentary triggered a lot of amazing memories.

### **Monday 5 December 2016**

We went to Buxton on Saturday in spite of feeling rough ourselves and knowing that Alistair's gang were not exactly in the pink. We got there really early and Alistair left us with the boys while he went to do a couple of hours on his organisation's stall at the Christmas Fair. We waited until Julie got home, feeling iller than any of the rest of us, and headed for home while there was still some daylight. We were both pretty weary by the time we got back and had a fairly lazy evening. On Sunday Pat made mince pies while I cooked a proper Sunday roast and then started a new batch of bread using the stash from the previous one (the first using Allinsons yeast rather than sourdough).

For some reason the PC would not shut down last night and was still showing its shutting-down box when I came down this morning. I tried fiddling, to no effect, and ended up holding the power button down until the machine switched off. To my great relief it switched itself back on again after a few seconds and started up quite normally. The fact that I am writing this suggests that all is now OK.

It was still dark when I got down, with the temperature at -2 degrees. A sweatshirt, my ski jacket and gloves gave me adequate protection. I repeated the walk I did with the nosebleed on Friday, but continued to the second junction where the watch showed

18 minutes 55 seconds. I turned back and came home through the estate, clocking 38 minutes 55 seconds for the whole walk.

The sponge prepared last night was looking good and at 7:30am I added the first 300 grams each water and flour to start the dough and at 9:30am added the second identical batch. At 12:00 Emanuel's amazing scraper-kneading-in-the-bowl was complete and the dough, which felt really good, was starting its 60-minute proving.

Pat left for brother Anton's at about 10:30am, leaving me with the clear run.

While the dough was on each of its six 10-minute rests, I was sorting out the kitchen lights. The LED lamps I bought for the downlighters and spots were failing at an amazing rate, but a parcel arrived yesterday containing six Duracell branded GU10 spots from 7dayshop.com. I managed to reinstate all the downlighter except one, because one of the silly little wire retaining clips had flown away and disappeared somewhere in the kitchen. Luckily I found that these could be bought on Ebay and I ordered a pack of ten for £2.95! Meanwhile, one bulb is hanging low on its wire, but is lit. The next job, ordering another 6-pack of bulbs from 7dayshop.com (a mere £9.79), was done by 12:30.

Once I had my rolls on their baking sheets on top of the hot cooker, which was a lot easier because the dough was better to handle than the previous batch, and covered with clingfilm, they grew in size very rapidly. Obviously using the ferment from the previous batch was fine – maybe better than a fresh one with new yeast. I got the first two batches in the oven less than an hour later and cooked them for only 20 minutes. When they came out the crusts were much thinner than with previous bakes, so I had to accept that I have been over-baking my bread. Once the rolls were cooled I sealed a dozen in each of two large freezer bags and put them in the garage freezer. The remaining four went in a small bag in the indoor freezer for immediate tasting. The bread even smells better than previous bakes, which have never smelt very interesting.

## **Tuesday 6 December 2016**

With moderate fog and the temperature around freezing, we did the same walk as yesterday but in the opposite direction, up through the estate (20 minutes 30 seconds) and back down the A60 with a brief toddle on the long lead around a small public garden for a total of 41 minutes 3 seconds.

I couldn't wait to try the new batch of bread, so I took two of the rolls out of the freezer and put them in a small plastic bag, leaving them in the kitchen to defrost for lunch. They felt strangely light compared with the last batch: they were supposed to weigh 67 grams, while the previous ones were nominally 86 grams. I am pleased to report that both Pat and I found them very good indeed, with a thinner crust which was only moderately crunchy in places, a springy, open crumb and a very pleasant smell. I will get another batch under way before the end of the week to feed our Boxing Day guests.

## **Wednesday 7 December 2016**

This morning's temperature was nine degrees, after several days with zero or less. We are promised some seriously unseasonal weather with daytime peaks in double figures. The morning wasn't as nice as I had hoped, though, with a brisk wind blowing after a modest fall of rain earlier. There had not been enough to create real puddles, though, so we reverted to the usual 40-minute route. It was still almost dark when we set out, with an ominous, almost-black sky to the east, but this quickly lightened and we got home in something near to daylight., having reached the second gate in 19 minutes 34 seconds and the whole route in just 40 minutes.

Checking back, we have done seven consecutive weeks, each with the full set of five walks, since our break in Cornwall. None of the walks have been seriously affected by problems with knees, ankles or any other rusty bits.

Because of other commitments I couldn't bake today, but I will put a sponge on tonight for tomorrow. Rather than baking for an arbitrary twenty minutes, I will test at fifteen minutes to see if I can get a softer crust with a fully cooked crumb.

We went out to lunch with Pat's sister Jackie and her husband Bob – a really generous and well-cooked meal at a pub about halfway between here and their home. After that, and a very long sit and chat before separating, we were good for little more than a lazy evening.

### **Thursday 8 December 2016**

Yesterday's beer must have had a powerful effect, because when I woke up this morning I realised that I had forgotten to start my bake. Actually, that is probably no bad thing because we have to do some shopping this morning.

It was a dark and wet morning when I got up, with the temperature at an improbable 12 degrees. It was drizzling when we set out. Then we got light rain. And by the time we were approaching the second gate to turn round (19 minutes 37 seconds) it was raining quite hard. My glasses were steamed-up on the inside and covered in raindrops on the outside, and it was still fairly dark, so visibility was atrocious. By the time we got home (39 minutes 43 seconds) we were both very wet (though my cagoule worked fine) and spent a fun few minutes with the towels in the kitchen. I then had to keep Bailey off the new sofas, even with their dog-proofing throws, until he dried out properly. It is forecast to be dry and still amazingly mild for the time of year over the next two weeks, with daytime temperatures between 13 degrees today and 7 degrees by the end of next week. A white Christmas...?

We did a big shop during the morning, with a short stop in town, including M&S, but mainly at Aldi and ending with me doing a solo three-item visit to Sainsbury's while Pat waited in the car.

We were both surprisingly weary after lunch, so after unpacking and tidying we watched a very dismal American rom-com – only because we mistook the star, Sarah Lancaster, for our own Sarah Lancashire, which would have been strange enough to be interesting. We were just too tired to abandon the movie, daft and predictable as it was.

I decided to make the sponge for tomorrow's bread before dinner, so my fatigued brain wouldn't forget it again. Dinner was a nice little salmon fillet each (from M&S) with parmentier potatoes from Aldi, followed by some really delicious fruit yogurts, also from M&S. Then *MasterChef* and whatever followed it – I can't remember!

### **Friday 9 December 2016**

Having been up to the loo a few times, I must have fallen asleep again. When I came to and checked the watch, it was exactly 6:45, so I had caught up on my sleep very well. I felt a bit groggy when I got up, though, and didn't really sort myself out until we started walking.

I had some large envelopes to post so I decided to walk to and from the top of the village again, going through the estate first because that is where one of our two Post Offices is. We turned with the watch at 19 minutes 23 seconds and completed the walk in 37 minutes 47 seconds.

I remembered to weigh myself after ablutions, and weighed in at 13 stone 5¼ pounds. Initially I was disappointed but this was only a pound and a half more than two weeks ago, and we did have a whopping lunch on Wednesday. Looking on the

darker side, it is eight pounds more than the all-time low on the 1 July, when my total weight loss reached 30 pounds. I will stick to my resolution and carry on normally unless I hit 13½ stone. If I reach that point I will go back on the fasting diet.

After setting up for breakfast, I added 300 grams each of water and flour to my very lively-looking sponge and wrote up my notebook with a list of the remaining additions. That was when I realised that I didn't have enough bread flour to finish the job, so I wrote a list for a quick after-breakfast trip to the village Co-op!

I finished mixing the dough and the amazing Emanuel's in-the-bowl kneading routine at midday, leaving the dough to rest for an hour before shaping and proving the rolls. The dough looked and felt superb. I used the hour to sort out my electrical toolbox, which I have had for decades but which finally gave up this week. I have two brand-new Stanley boxes, about the same size but not identical, to choose from (it's a long story of impulsive online Christmas shopping!).

I got the tools sorted between kneading my dough and shaped the rolls and set them to prove at 1:30pm. They rose amazingly quickly, spreading outwards rather than upwards, which was what I wanted (I hope they will fit in the toaster to defrost but I doubt it!) at an astonishing rate. They were ready to bake inside an hour and I put the first tray in the oven at 2:35.

I don't know what mutant strain of yeast Allinsons use, but it really is awesome!

I now have 50 rolls in the freezers, so that will probably be enough for the Boxing Day beano, particularly as we won't have as many guests as usual.

All this time on my feet seems to have done no harm at all. Well done, bones!

## **Monday 12 December 2016**

I can't recall anything notable about Saturday, except enjoying a lie-in and sorting out presents and cards for stepson Steve's family and for my daughter Sarah and husband Dave, ready for the trip to Derby for the annual swap.

Sunday morning gave us another lie-in. We decided to have a brunch as there would be snacks at Steve's. We got a few things done before showering and I enjoyed bacon and Pat's amazing scrambled eggs while she settled for cereal and toast. Quite a notable brunch, because I finally finished the very last of my incredibly durable 2008 Seville orange marmalade (unless there is an odd jar lurking in the shed – I will check later).

We had a good run down to Derby and the satnav took us unerringly to Steve and Sue's by exactly the route we used to use when we lived in Derby. There was no way I would find them in the maze of the huge Oakwood estate after all these years without GPS. It was quite nostalgic passing what was once Brookside Boarding School where I was third-in-charge for several years, a job that gave me the opportunities leading to my amazing career as an advisory teacher for ICT in the curriculum and, later, as a pretty adventurous web developer.

We had a really enjoyable afternoon and early evening with 'the kids' (all of whom are pushing fifty now!). The high spot for me was seeing, and hearing, how good Steve had become on the guitar. I had tried to interest him in it as a teenager, but without success.

Bailey had been alone for six hours when we got home, and went absolutely insane with delight when we got home – the most frantic welcome ever!

I got up on the dot of 6:45 this morning after a good night's sleep. To my surprise, Bailey was on the bed in the study, where I had left him last night. That was good because it meant less disruption of Pat's dog-proofing throws on the new sofas.

Dawn was just breaking when we were ready for our walk, with a clear sky and the temperature at about three degrees. I decided to do the usual 40-minute walk down the lane, but it was horribly muddy after whatever the farmer had been doing with his tractors. Unless today and tonight are bone-dry I will go back to one of our street walks tomorrow. We reached the first gate in 19 minutes 24 seconds and completed the walk in 38 minutes 47 seconds.

While Pat was at Anton's, I got all our boxes of Christmas decorations down the ladder from the garage loft and into the conservatory, and then brought our potted Christmas tree in from the garden. I had a long wrestling match with three sets of white LED lights, so everything was ready for Pat's creative flair before she got home.

By dinner time the sitting-room at least was really beginning to look festive. I proposed a work-sharing deal with Pat. If she would continue with decorations I would paint the hall tomorrow, a job which I have been putting off for several weeks. So I am committed!

## **Tuesday 13 December 2016**

I got up at 6:45am after another good sleep. It was cloudy but dry, with the temperature at seven degrees. There had been rain during the night, so I decided to avoid the muddy lane. We took a roundabout route through the estate, getting lost in the maze of small streets, and eventually clocked 44 minutes 32 seconds. I was relieved to get home as my legs – and particularly my right knee – were protesting right through the walk. My many trips up and down the ladder yesterday had obviously worn the poor old legs out.

Having finally got myself motivated, the rest of the day was spent with dustsheets, ladders, masking tape, brushes, rollers and a huge can of magnolia matt emulsion. The main preparation was getting the many pictures down, filling the pinholes left by the hooks, getting the little bits of Blu-Tack which I had used to keep the pictures level off with the minimum of damage and filling the torn bits of lining paper left by the very old adhesive. I put on the masking tape while I waited for the filler to dry and then went over the walls with a piece of very fine garnet paper, levelling the filler and various other blemishes. I painted over the fillings with magnolia matt to seal them. Then there were all the edges to do with a brush and the rest with a small fleece roller (I realised when doing the sitting room that this was much more manageable for my poor old shoulders than the traditional wide one!).

I really surprised myself by managing to do the whole of the hall above the dado rail and clear up behind myself by dinner time. My back, legs and feet were painful right through the evening.

## **Wednesday 14 December 2016**

I slept very well in spite of my well-earned aches and pains, not getting up to pee until around 5:30. Then I must have crashed out again and my internal clock told me to check the time at 6:35. Getting my socks on was a bit of an ordeal on wobbly legs, but I was surprised how much of last night's pain had disappeared. I must admit that I was tempted for a moment to skip the walk, but Bailey and I got off at the usual time in an improbable temperature of 11 degrees. The ground was damp but the sky was clearing. I did compromise on distance, though, going round the football-pitch loop and finishing it with a short-cut so that the walk clocked a dismal 24 minutes 16 seconds. Thanks to yesterday's marathon the two days totalled almost 69 minutes – well above the recommended half-hour a day.

I felt better by the end of the walk and was really looking forward to finishing the hall today. Pat was going out with her girlfriends, so as soon as she had gone I got stuck



in. I needed to paint the Anaglypta below the dado with silk finish emulsion in a colour quite a lot darker than the magnolia, so there was all the caper with masking tape, brushes and rollers to get through. Then I painted the dado rail and the radiator with satin finish magnolia. The final result was quite classy.

The last jobs of the day were to get all the boxes which had held the decorations back into the garage loft and to get a power supply to the LED lights wrapped around the garland on our spiral staircase.

Finally, the treat: a long, slow and pretty hot shower and a change of clothes. I couldn't be bothered to cook much, so I settled for beans on toast with a fried egg.

Tomorrow we have to get Anton to the hospital in the middle of Sheffield...

### **Thursday 15 December 2016**

I struggled getting to sleep last night, with pain in at least one shoulder whichever position I tried. However, I think I must have had a pretty good night once I got off, and I work up sometime after 6am. I just got through my ablutions in time to catch the 7 o'clock news. It was a damp, dull morning with the temperature at seven degrees, so I ruled the lane out again. We went round the back, with a lap of the football pitch using the long lead, getting round in 31 minutes.

To my surprise Pat was up when we got back, so my rigid morning routine was totally disrupted!

We left for Sheffield at about 9:15am, running into a couple of hold-ups presumably designed to stop us enjoying the end of the huge road-works which have been going on for months at the top of town. We got Anton to the Royal Hallamshire Hospital at 10:50 for his 11:30 appointment. I dropped the two of them at one of the entrances and then headed for the multi-storey car park. As ever, this was very full, so based on previous experience I went down rather than up. As before, the very lowest level – three or four down from the entrance – had plenty of vacant spaces. The down-side was that I had to walk up a lot of stairs to get out. Luckily the steps were fairly low, and the dodgy knee coped very well. It handled going back down quite well, too, when we left after an extended wait in the hospital pharmacy, now a branch of Boots! We took Anton straight home and he seemed quite happy for us to leave straight away after all the stress. The news about his vision was bad, and he probably needed some quiet time to take it in.

### **Friday 16 December 2016**

I was up at 6:35 this morning after a couple of restless hours, so we got off for the walk quite early – early enough for it still to be pitch dark. Again, we took a street route because although it was warm at 8 degrees everything was pretty damp. We went up the main road to the top of the village, turning round after 20 minutes 29 seconds and came back through the estate, completing the walk in 40 minutes 9 seconds.

We have been putting up more Christmas decorations during the day, and the house is now looking really Christmassy. I spent a while with a small brush and tiny tins of paint and varnish touching up various blemishes in the hall paintwork. Then I finally got round to unblocking the drain that takes the waste from the washing machine as well as water from one side of the kitchen roof. It had filled up with gravel on top of the grate, and then with sand from the job we had done on our block paving a while back. I placed a couple of strategic pebbles stolen from the pond, which should stop the gravel getting down the drain. Finally, I had to put a lovely natural wreath made by our friend John on the outside of the front door, balanced on the inside by a smaller artificial one.

Not quite finally, because trays of chicken wings and potato wedges went in the oven 15 minutes ago.

Pat had a text from Anton's support services saying that he had not answered the door when his helper arrived. This worried her, so we decided that we should go and check on him tomorrow.

### **Saturday 17 December 2016**

We had a bit of a scare with Bailey last night. He sicked up everything he had eaten up to and including the offcuts of cartilage from our chicken wings, and was then very lethargic. At bedtime he seemed reluctant to go out for a last pee and was sniffing suspiciously at the ground and the air when he did go just outside the back door. Then he growled quite aggressively at me when I went to give him a goodnight fuss. Very odd.

Worrying about him cut my Saturday lie-in short. Luckily Pat sat up at about 7:30 so I asked if she wanted a cup of tea, to which she replied quite enthusiastically. I went downstairs, giving my usual quiet greetings to an unseen Bailey, and found him lying in the hall. Reassuringly, his tail started wagging against the carpet. He got more and more sociable as the morning went on, in spite of being fed only dry food, and we felt fine about leaving him.

Anton opened the door to us but was thoroughly confused. It seemed that the helper had arrived far later than Anton expected and he had taken himself off to bed for a rest.

I went to his local Co-op to get him some cigarettes, milk and mince pies (Pat's idea), and soon after I got back we left him to get on with his day. The rest of the day was spent getting the place ready for Christmas.

Over tea we went through my list of suggestions for the Boxing Day menu and I compiled a shopping list from this. Pat will be going to Antons (again!) on Monday and we have been booked to mind Ewan and Tom for a few hours on Wednesday, so time is running out.

I did an improvised Stroganoff with a whole pack of rather miserable button mushrooms and a scrawny little rib-eye steak from our new young butcher, which had been lurking in the freezer for some time. It turned out surprisingly well with plenty of Uncle Ben's rice.

I decided to take a year-old duck crown out of the freezer for tomorrow's dinner.

### **Sunday 18 December 2016**

Pat disappeared into the front bedroom for much of the day, most of the time spent wrapping presents and packing spare Christmas stuff away. We wanted to get the inflatable double bed up ready for Anton, but the whole room was pretty chaotic. The worst bit was getting several large baskets which had been under the old bed (now at Aidan's) onto the tops of the built-in wardrobes. This required a ladder, and the removal of most of the fabric remnants they contained so that I could get the baskets up and then refill them with batches passed up by Pat. What she has kept all this stuff for, I can't begin to guess, but she is very reluctant to part with any of it.

While she was in there I got some of the pictures back on the hall walls, making it look a lot more like home.

Once the front bedroom was tidy and vacuumed, we plugged the inflatable – actually, self-inflating – bed in a switched it on. It blew itself up remarkably quickly into a comfortable full-height 4ft 6in double divan.

I had decided to machine-wash and tumble-dry my lovely down pillows. They came out of the washer feeling like sacks of coal, with the filling clumped into tight balls. I was very worried, but after a prolonged period of cool tumbling I had one that felt really good, which loads of 'loft', and another that will need some more tumbling tomorrow.

I filleted the breasts off the duck crown and the meat seemed fine. I 'pan-roasted' (fried to us non-chefs) them put the frying pan in the oven for about nine minutes, as cheft seem to do an awful lot.. The result was moist, medium-rare and really nice with potatoes roast in the fat rendered from the carcass and frozen petits-pois, followed by mince pies and a cup of tea.

### **Monday 19 December 2016**

I slept fairly well after the weekend's efforts, and had a really comfy lie-in for about an hour before getting up at 6:20am. I felt fresher and livelier than I have been on most mornings recently, which was cheering (I have booked an appointment with the GP next week to raise the question of my chornic tiredness). Google had our local temperature as 3 degrees, so it was sweatshirt, fleece and gloves weather. As it turned out, I didn't need the gloves. It was a dry, bright-ish morning and I seemed to be setting a decent pace. As it has not raised much at all recently I decided to give the lane a try, and it had certainly improved sine the last visit. We reached the second gate in 20 minutes 12 seconds and finished the walk in 40 minutes 11 seconds, slower than it had felt.

When Patricia had gone off to Anton's I hung a few more pictures in the hall. Previously they had dangled on panel pins which just held the edges of the franmes – just, because they were infuriatingly easy to know down. Now every one has screw-eyes and proper string to hold them on proper picture hooks bought from Amazon at the weekend.

I had to put one of my pillows back in the dryer and it blew up like a balloon – so wonderful I put the other one back too! The two freshly inflated pillows were a delight when I got to bed.

### **Tuesday 20 December 2016**

I got up for a pee around 4:45am and didn't really get back toi sleep, checking the time at just after 6 o'clock. I must have dozed off then because I snapped awake at 6:37.

I decided to take things a bit more slowly and start the walk a little later, so when we went out we had a dim, grey apology for daylight. Tomorrow will be the shortest day, the winter solstice, and then things will start to get better. There had been a little rain, but I decided to do the lane route again. There had also been some agricultural activity yesterday, so the mud on the tarmac had increased. Nevertheless we were a minute quicker than yesterday getting to the second gate. I am not sure about the time for the whole walk because I got a bit mixed up with the stopwatch. Although the temperature was only three degrees when we started, Although the temperature was only three degrees when we started, I was sweating when we got back.

Sometime before 10am, having sorted out my shopping list, I went to Sainsbury's for a long drawn-out pursuit of what we needed. After lunch I repeated the process at Aldi, focusing mainly on wine and beer. That more-or-less wrote off the day.

### **Thursday 22 December 2016**

I had a lovely comfortable, restful laze in bed from before 6am until 6:45. It was a clear morning with the quarter-moon and Venus quite high in the sky and close together. I decided to do just the circuit round the back of our house with the football

pitch as the high spot for Bailey. He had a friendly encounter with an untethered black Labrador. The stopwatch routine fell apart a bit but we were out for over half an hour.

Pat came down shortly after we got back, so we had an early breakfast and got down to business. Believe it or not, I still had shopping to do. I went to M&S for chilled, ready-prepared Chinese dishes – our dinner on Saturday (Christmas Eve) with Anton. Then to Wilkinsons for my mouthwash (generic Corsodyl) and some Christmas treats for Bailey. Finally to Sainsbury's for quite a lot of other stuff to complete the preparations for Boxing Day. Amazingly I used one large shopping bag at each shop and didn't fill any of them, but I was out for around two hours. Sainsbury's in particular was a madhouse!

Once I was back, I joined Pat in the kitchen to make hot-smoked salmon, (tinned) mackerel pâté, apple sauce, brandy butter and rum sauce while she made sage-and-onion stuffing and all sorts of other tasty stuff. She was still going strong when I declared a dinner break and cooked two of M&S's delicious Coquilles St Jacques ready meals. After dinner she decided that she 'needed' to make more mince pies, and I eventually managed to coax her out of the kitchen to watch the Professional Masterchef final.

During preparations for bed, I walked into the kitchen and found her lying on her back on the floor. Apparently she had been crouching in front of a corner cupboard and had fallen backwards, banging one elbow. That is two falls in a few days, which is quite worrying.

### **Friday 23 December 2016**

I snapped awake this morning on the dot of 6:45, from what felt like a deep sleep.

It was a chilly (4 degrees), breezy morning with a fairly bright sky emerging from the gloom. I decided to repeat yesterday's walk, but in the opposite direction. We had three friendly encounters with other dogs and three poo-stops, but I managed to keep the stopwatch under control in the brightening light (it isn't easy in the dark). I added a second half-lap of the football pitch and a short loop on the streets, and we got home just after 8 o'clock, with the watch showing 30 minutes 4 seconds.

Today was supposed to be a lazy day, celebrating the fact that our Christmas preparations were finished - apart from me catching up with the last bit of yesterday's vacuuming by doing the kitchen floor with the vac and the mop – and we actually managed this. We went out to Welbeck, starting with the farm shop, which – as expected – was seething with people. It took me at least fifteen minutes to get to the cheese counter, by which time Pat was back from the patisserie and chocolate sections. I bought some of our favourites: Lincolnshire Poacher Cheddar, Colston Basset Stilton, Kirham's Lancashire, Brie de Meaux, Roquefort and one or two new ones. We went and did a little recreational shopping in what used to be a garden centre but seems to have lost its focus, and then had an enjoyable light lunch at the café.

The rest of the day really was lazy. We watched a really good film about the author of the Mary Poppins books (yes – really!) and Walt Disney, which got us through to a light supper and a fairly early bed.

### **Saturday 24 December 2016**

I woke at my normal weekday time, but instead of walking the dog I left home shortly after seven o'clock, after just a cup of tea and a couple of biscuits, and drove up the road to Tickhill, which was fairly quiet. Even at that time our favourite butcher was decidedly *not* quiet, and it took quite a while to collect pork or pulling on Boxing Day, two different raised pies, two quiches and a kilo of sausage meat.

This afternoon we had to pick up a few more bits for the Boxing Day Bash from Aldi – pizzas (their Carlo brans is really good!) and rolls mostly – before picking Anton up and visiting Jackies to swop presents. In preparation for Anton's stay, I edited the favourites on our amazing smart telly, putting the *Dave* and *Quest* channels, his favourites at the top of the programme guide.

It was strange not having lots of pre-Christmas food preparation to do. We had done most of what was could be done in advance for Boxing Day.

## **Tuesday 27 December 2016**

Blink and you miss it! We had our usual present-opening ritual on Sunday morning and then went to Aidan's for Christmas dinner

Then came Boxing Day. We had prepared as much as we could in advance but there was a lot of setting-up and final dishing to do. We fed and watered our twelve guests more – much more! - than adequately, adhering to the Marsden motto 'Never knowingly under-catered' (thanks to John Lewis!). Then, suddenly, it was all over bar the clearing up, which was a pretty mammoth task.

This morning I had the sniffles and didn't feel much like a walk. To my surprise, neither did the dog. He was having trouble with his right front foot or leg: he was able to walk but was trying hard to keep the foot off the ground. I went so far as to print the pet insurance claim form for his surgery in Buxton, so that I would have details of the surgery he was registered with in Hucknall in case we have to take him to the vet here.

I managed to get the dishwasher emptied (probably a record load) and most of the contents put away before Pat appeared.

We were all set to have a totally lazy vegging day when Alistair phoned and announced that they were coming over to see us. They were badly missed yesterday, but we thought they would be coming next Sunday, New Year's Day. So back to the freezer to retrieve lots of last night's leavings...

We had a really enjoyable day with them. Even Tom, who is going through a seriously naughty spell, was entertaining – mostly.

It was another tiring day though, right on top of Boxing Day, and we were glad to get to bed.

## **Wednesday 28 December 2016**

I woke up for a pee at 7am and saw from the lights that Anton was up, so I decided to stay up. I found him sitting in his T-shirt with no trousers, having his first smoke of the day.

The outside temperature was around -1, so I decided that I would light the woodburner again. I took a cup of tea up to Pat at 9am. She didn't even stir, and forty minutes later there was still no sign of her. By that time I had split some logs for kindling and got the firer going, and Anton and I had drunk our third cups of tea.

The really good news is that Bailey's right leg seems to be almost back to normal – a huge relief. I might even take him for a short walk later.

Pat had a success booking a home hairdresser to give Anton a long-overdue trim tomorrow afternoon. This seems to have been his main concern before going home.

We eventually got through breakfast – porridge for us and Anton's usual bacon, mushroom and egg sandwich – at 10:45am. Let the chill-out begin...

The Anton situation wasn't solved after all. For no obvious reason he decided that he wanted to go home today, so Pat had to cancel the hairdresser.

We need to get the message across that he is no longer safe living alone and that he needs a lot of support. His vision has deteriorated lately to the point where he cannot enjoy television, with or without subtitles, which was the only thing – apart from smoking – that gave him any interest or pleasure.

We got him home by mid-afternoon with an ample supply of food, and notified his support service that he would be there for their next scheduled visit on Friday. He really seemed to be relieved to be home, and it was a real relief to get ourselves back to our normal family unit – just Pat, Paul and Bailey. I had let the woodburner go out, so I re-lit it to complete the cosy picture.

I visited the GP at the unlikely hour of 18:40, to ask about my chronic tiredness, the slowdown in my normally rapid clotting and healing and my intermittently fishy-smelling urine. He gave me a fairly thorough going over, feeling my liver and taking my blood-pressure, which he said was 'a little high'. He tested the urine specimen I had taken with me and said it was clear. Then he wrote me a letter for a battery of blood tests: ELU, Bone Profile, LFT, HbA1c (that's the key diabetes test), TFT, FBC, AUTO DIFF, APTT (presumably liver function as the note says 'Not on Heparin'), Prothrombin Time (sounds like clotting), Vitamin B12, Folate and Ferritin (iron?), which should give him a pretty complete profile of my body chemistry!. He also put me on the waiting list for a home blood-pressure kit and advised me to cut down on the wine consumption which, at half a bottle or less a day, I have always thought pretty moderate!

### **Thursday 29 December 2016**

Today really was pretty lazy. The one dramatic moment was when I realised that Bailey was charging around like a lunatic because a tiny wren had got into the house. He got it cornered between two large planters by the conservatory doors and somehow I managed to get it from there into the conservatory. Then I closed the doors from the sittingroom and opened the ones into the garden, managing to get through to bring in logs and split some for kindling. By evening, I was pretty sure the poor terrified little creature had got out, and even Bailey seemed convinced!

Tech joke: after almost a year since the new 40-inch Panasonic smart TV arrived, I have finally cracked the favourite channels facility – how to compile a favourites list and organise the channels into my preferred sequence and then to switch the favourites on and off from the channel information bar (press blue!). Moving channels into and out of the favourites list and changing their order is easy and intuitive. The favourites facility controls which channels are shown when I access the electronic programme guide and when I use the channel up/down button to select channels. Even better, I finally cracked how to use *FreeView Play* to access previous days' broadcasts. It really couldn't be simpler: first go to the channel you want to wind back; then use the left control to go *past* the beginning of the day, and you see a different display, with a column for each day showing the programmes in time order. Go to the programme you want and hit OK. Job done.

### **Friday 30 December 2016**

I have had a stinking, sniffing, sneezy cold, the like of which I can't remember having for years, for most of this week. This and Bailey's sore right front foot, now thankfully back to normal, have dissuaded me from doing the week's walks. I really must get back into the routine on Monday.

The cold really flared up at bedtime last night, so I dosed it with two paracetamol, a high-strength decongestant tablet (Sainsbury's generic and much cheaper version of Sudafed) and a squirt on each side with the steroid nose spray. This seemed to calm things down and I slept really well, waking for a pee at around 6:15 this morning and getting up at about 7:15.

The lack of walking may help, in part, to explain the week's two-pound weight gain: I have passed the dreaded 13½ stone mark, hitting 13 stone 8¾ pounds. I haven't eaten anything like as much as I would at Christmas, but obviously too much. I have promised myself that, if I pass the mark, I would go back on the fasting diet until I get back below the target. I should do this next week...

Feeling a bit woozy – light-headed and bleary – I went out after breakfast to get my bloods taken, pick up Pat's prescriptions and grab a few essentials. I had perked up quite a lot by the time I got back. I only had to wait about fifteen minutes for the bloods – just three samples for twelve tests – and was back home in time for coffee. My head had cleared a bit by then.

I had phoned home from the Co-op to check what was on the shopping list but Pat had not answered. It turned out that she had gone hyperactive while I was out, something she tends to do, and as well as going berserk with housekeeping she had cleaned and laid the fire, and was out bringing in logs when I got home. I was furious because she was lugging a heavy basket of logs, normally my job. She hadn't brought in many larger logs, so I went out to split some big ones with my trusty felling axe, just to assert my masculine superiority! I have cracked how to split down really big logs, most of which are quarter-sections from trunks or branches over a foot in diameter. I split off the sharp corners and then take off fairly thin slices, rather than attacking the middle, which never works.

The rest of the day was quite lazy, with a TV movie in the afternoon, chicken wings and wedges for dinner and more Christmas catch-ups through the evening.

Again, my nose decided to explode just before bedtime, so I gave it the same treatment as last night.

### **Saturday 31 December 2016**

I came to at 7:45 this morning with vague recollections of having got up for pees earlier, but I had had a good night's sleep again. I needed a pee quite urgently, and was just debating whether to get back into bed for my permitted Saturday lie-in when I heard the slapping of Bailey's ears as he gave himself a good shake. Although I felt pretty groggy, I decided to go down and let him out. As it turned out, he didn't want to go, even when I went out first into the strangely warm morning – not frost and eight degrees, but forecast to get colder again tomorrow so I had better cut some more logs today. He must have a cast-iron bladder. He finally went out just before 9 o'clock.

As well as feeling bleary, I had a very sore lower back, which is odd: you would think that eight hours resting in a relaxed position would ease it, but instead it seems to stiffen.

I boiled up the bones from last night's chicken also emptied a 255-gram bag of Aldi's excellent scallops into a bowl to defrost in the fridge for a main course of Coquilles St Jacques tonight. I put a bottle of Jacob's Creek bubbly, which someone must have brought to one of our gatherings, to drink in the New Year. I would like to say that 2017 couldn't be worse than this year, but world politics look pretty threatening. Maybe fewer celebrity deaths, though, because it has been a heartbreaking year, topped for me by the loss of Bowie. Thank Heaven the Stones are still kicking up a storm.

After a bowl of hot porridge (Scotts Old Fashioned Porage Oats, of course!) I sorted out the logs, took some of the thicker ones outside to split down, split some more into decent kindling, laid the fire and cleaned up all the ash and wood-dust with the trusty Vax hi-tech two-in-one cordless cleaner. Then it was time for coffee, which I had brewed in between the other jobs. The weather is forecast to be quite warm, but a log fire will make our seeing-in of the New Year feel really cosy. Unlike my miserable old

sod of a father (who once booked a taxi for 11:45pm), we never miss the midnight chimes, however terrible the TV programs may be.

We watched the tail-end of *Saturday Kitchen* over coffee. It will never be anywhere near as enjoyable as it was with James Martin presenting, so we were pleased to find yet another repeat of one of his *Home Comforts* series following on.

By this time my sinuses were feeling quite nasty – only a faint dull ache, but a bit swimmy and just uncomfortable. After the lumberjack act I was content to goggle at a few saved Christmas programmes once we had had lunch. The afternoon produced one or two goodies, including a really moving documentary about Margot Fonteyn which had me – hardly a ballet fan – in tears at the end. Dinner was Coquilles St Jacques with a nice Aldi Sauvignon Blanc (poor person's Sancerre).

By the middle of the evening I was beginning to doubt whether I would stay awake to see the New Year in, but I perked up when Jools Holland's annual *Hootenanny* started. Towards midnight I took out the bottle of Jacob's Creek Chardonnay/Pinot Noir fizz which I had put in the fridge earlier and set out two flutes. I also typed a New Year greeting to all the extended family into *WhatsApp*. I managed to send that on Big Ben's first big bong, recording a timestamp of 00:00, and then we toasted the year in, Pat with a slug of the elderflower liqueur I had bought her as a small auxiliary Christmas present added to her fizz. The wine was delicious, but we saved the rest of the bottle for tomorrow. To my amazement, we stayed wide awake until the *Hootenanny* ended at 1:25am, when we took ourselves off to bed.

### **Sunday 1 January 2017**

Well, here it is: 2017. Let's hope it manages to be a little less horrific than 2016.

Having turned out my light after 2am, I managed to stay more-or-less asleep right through until well after 9 o'clock, when I woke feeling remarkably fresh and rested. Maybe I should stay up late and get up earlier every day!

Bailey was still a bit drowsy when I got downstairs, and didn't even want to go out for a pee until much later.

Following Boxing Day's failed pulled pork, I prepared a 1kg piece of rolled pork shoulder for slow roasting in the old enamel roaster, with onions, carrots, crushed garlic, rosemary, sage and thyme for the joint to sit on. It got 30 minutes on the roaster lid with the oven at maximum, after which it looked quite nicely coloured, and then two hours at 140 degrees before testing. Meanwhile I roasted the potatoes using the microwave's 'convection' mode, and cooked sweetheart cabbage and nice slim organic carrots, making gravy from the juices in the roaster. I think the pork was rather overdone, and therefore a bit dry. I must say that I haven't had much success with roast pork or lean chops. I much prefer lamb shoulder which, given the same treatment, would have been far more succulent. We had Christmas pudding with brandy butter (me only) and rum sauce for afters, washed down with the rest of the fizz (mostly me).

I spent most of the afternoon cooking dinner and listening to my favourites CD of MP3 tracks – 71 of them, from *A Whiter Shade of Pale* to *Ziggy Stardust*. I never tire of this compilation, using the Panasonic stereo's facility to whizz through tracks, reading titles on the display.

My cold was a lot better today, with few nose-blows and no sneezes, though I was still feeling 'sinusy'.

The evening was spent catching up with more of the very few decent TV programmes we found to record over Christmas. We had nearly caught up. I discovered that we had missed *The Adele Story* on Channel 5, but I managed to retrieve it on the channel's catch-up app. Not really my kind of music, but I really



warmed to this delightfully natural, unaffected working-class girl from Tottenham. She wears her heart on her sleeve and is impressive as both a writer and a performer, which is reflected in her string of awards, including an Oscar for her theme song to what I think is by far the best of the later Bond movies, *Skyfall*.

Nothing to report from the ankles. They dealt with hours of food preparation over Christmas and right up to today. A walk tomorrow...?

### **Monday 2 January 2017**

Somehow I managed to switch my head back into normal weekday mode, rolling over to check the time at 6:47am. I felt much fresher than I expected and got straight out of bed. I even caught Bailey by surprise: he was lying on the hall floor and I tripped over him in the pitch darkness (lengthening days after the solstice?). I felt amazingly full of beans, and even managed to empty the dishwasher before the tea was mashed. I delayed my ablutions until after the 7 o'clock news.

Bailey was beside himself when I got his harness and lead off the hook.

The temperature was just one degree above freezing, so I went for my cosiest sweatshirt and my light but super-warm ski jacket. With the stock of poo-bags and doggy-treats replenished, we set out to do the loop round the back via the football pitch. The asphalt pavements were a little slippery, but we got round without mishap – and without gloves in the dry, cold breeze. We completed the walk in 29 minutes 5 seconds, Bailey right back on form, and without significant protest from my bones – or the nose. Fingers crossed, it looks as though my immune system has got the better of the virus. Whether it can deal with the secondary bug in the sinuses remains to be seen...

At one o'clock, after sorting out this week's chicken stock and watching a fascinating documentary about Thomas Cromwell, I was still feeling quite well. So fingers even *more* crossed!

I gave my Allinsons flour and yeast ferment a good refresh and put it in the fridge when it was erupting volcanically. I won't be baking for a while as I made several batches for Boxing Day, hardly any of which was used, so it's still in the freezer and responds very well to defrosting naturally in an open basket. However, I want to see how well a long-stored ferment performs.

Pat got home after a fairly satisfactory visit to Anton and we had bread, cheese and charcuterie together. We watched all three episodes of Lucy Worsley's series on Henry VIII's six wives, which was quite good, and with a phone call from my daughter Sarah that was the afternoon gone. At 5pm the cold still hadn't made itself felt.

We had yesterday's pork cold with reheated vegetables, gravy and stuffing, and apple sauce, followed by reheated Christmas pudding, rum sauce and brandy butter.

The evening's highlight was the return of *Silent Witness*. This has always been a favourite of ours – I just hope the BBC doesn't chop the series off after three weeks, which it seems to have been doing a lot lately. Before that we watched *University Challenge* – an absolute slaughter of an Oxford college by a redbrick university. I was very pleased with the number of questions I managed to answer – good exercise for the old brain. Before that we caught up with the second half of Rick Stein's 'long weekend' in Bordeaux. He has really matured as a TV presenter and I'm glad the BBC is giving him a fairly free hand.

### **Tuesday 3 January 2017**

I seemed to be awake for quite a long time this morning before I checked the time and got up at 6:40. It was a little 'warmer' at 4 degrees, though windier, so I managed without gloves again. The sky was partly clear with streaks of thin, dark

cloud and a lovely red sunrise. We did yesterday's walk in reverse, adding a full loop round the football field, and I was quite hot and sweaty when we got home. I had failed to restart the stopwatch after Bailey's second poo-stop, so I estimated the time at 35 minutes.

With Christmas and New Year over, we have to get out bearings back and try to remember what 'normal life' is all about!

The first bit of weekly routine, shifted from yesterday to today, was for me to change the bottom sheets and pillowcases on our beds and vacuum the bedroom with the little Vax two-in-one cleaner (which worked perfectly and then seemed to die when I tried to put it on charge). That gave me the incentive to have a shower and a shave.

When I sat down for coffee my blasted Kindle seemed to have died, too. I held the power button in for what seemed ages, and eventually it limped into its reset routine and started working normally again. Phew!

I checked the vacuum cleaner again after coffee and it was still dead. I visited Vax's website and eventually managed to get an email support request to them and an automatic email acknowledgment back between 12:30 and 1pm. It will be interesting to see how long it takes to get a human response. Strange that there should be a warm spot on the case of the handheld, and it was still warm and the machine was still not working at 17:30! By that time I had still not received a real response.

In the meantime I went out and split some more logs to provide adequate kindling. Tomorrow is forecast to start quite warm and finish very cold, so we will probably want the woodburner lit.

I have been swopping reminiscences with my little French brother Philippe today, sending him photos of our kitchen and lots of memories. He was a major influence on my love of French food back in nineteen-seventy-something.

I did cheese and mushroom omelettes for dinner, followed by Christmas cake and tea for both and an added mince pie for me. I must get the eating under control and get the surplus weight off.

### **Wednesday 4 January 2017**

I had the impression that I had been up for quite a few pees and had been pretty restless in the early morning, perhaps because both shoulders were painful, but I had found a really comfortable position – on my front with my head turned to the right, the left foot off the edge of the mattress and the right knee cocked – by around 5:45 and stayed with it for an hour, rising at 6:45. It was still quite dark then, but by the time we were ready for the walk at around 7:15 the cloudy sky was lightening, with even some brightness in the south-west. I chose a variant of yesterday's walk, which added some extra time on the football field, and we got home in 34 minutes 10 seconds.

I was convinced that the Vax cleaner was knackered, so I planned to dismantle it, pack it back in its box and take it back to Argos tomorrow, where I bought it in June.

Later on, after making that plan, I got an email from Vax saying that they would be sending a replacement handheld unit. There would be some delay due to stock-taking but it would be here in a couple of weeks. Later on they sent an email invoice which showed the price of the handheld unit (cancelled by a 100% rebate) as £221.99, which is £22 more than we paid for the whole two-in-one package! Pretty impressive service!

We had agreed that twelfth night would be Thursday 5 January, not the 6<sup>th</sup> which I have always used, so we did some preparatory dismantling of the Christmas stuff, leaving only the lighted tree and staircas garland in place. I got all the natural

greenery into a nearly empty and bone-dry builder's bag left over from last year and Pat had all the small decorations sorted and ready for packing-up, so tomorrow will be a question of getting the boxes down out of the garage loft, taking the lights and decorations off the tree and the garland and getting the potted tree back outside.

Sausages and chips tonight...

### **Thursday 5 January 2017**

I got up at 6:45 this morning, although I would have liked a little longer in bed. I don't know why I am so strict with myself, except that I think I would get lax if I let myself off the hook. The current plan, given the dark mornings, is to get downstairs in time to make a pot of tea before the 7 o'clock news and go to the bathroom afterwards. This morning I got the dishwasher emptied and the table set for breakfast during the news. By the time I was ready to go out, there was at least a hint of brightness in the east. Google gave me a local temperature of zero, but the air was bone dry, so it actually felt warmer than the last few mornings, and there was no frost on the ground. I didn't feel the need for gloves at all.

I decided to stick to the football field route, this time adding a full extra circuit of the pitch. We met a woman with a basset hound and had a peaceful encounter. We met them again on the second lap, when the other dog was off the lead, and then on the way home Bailey met an elderly spaniel as well, again without hostility. He got rewards for all three meetings. The walk took 35 minutes 17 seconds.

The plan for today was to finish the twelfth night routine, getting all the Christmas stuff stashed away. We also needed a modest amount of shopping, including some things which Christmas seems to have pushed off our Co-op's shelves, and Pat wanted some birthday cards, so a trip to Sainsbury's for both of us would be needed.

My first task was to get all the near-empty boxes down from the garage loft via our long extending ladder and into the conservatory so that Pat could pack everything away systematically. Next, I had to unravel two sets of LED lights from the potted tree and somehow get it outside without making a mess. This entailed lifting it out of its saucer, which still had some dirty, smelly water in it, onto a wad of newspapers and removing the saucer. Then I had to wangle the pot into a plastic bin liner to stop it dripping grotty water on the carpet as I took it out. The compost in the pot was quite waterlogged, so the whole thing was very heavy. I managed the task without mishap, though, and the tree was soon basking in the brilliant winter sunshine. Then I had to get another set of lights off the artificial garland which decorated the iron spiral staircase.

Pat was busily packing everything away, and by the time I had dealt with the tree and the lights there were quite a few refilled boxes ready to stack away. By the time it was all safely piled on the garage loft floor my feet were howling in protest from the manual ascents and descents on the ladder's narrow rungs.

By midday we had pretty well wiped away all evidence of Christmas. I suggested that we have lunch in Sainsbury's café before doing our shopping – not exactly a gourmet experience, I was sure, but it would save us sorting out a hot meal for tonight. Actually it was a pleasant surprise. Pat had 'hand-battered' (is there any other way?) cod with chips and mushy peas. The batter was beautifully crisp and the cod moist and flaky – vastly better than what either of our village chippies turn out. I had a beef lasagne with a nice fresh salad and light, crisp garlic bread on the side. The lasagne was good, if a trifle bland. We had Sainsbury's own-brand top-end fizzy drinks with our meals – Sicilian lemonade for me and elderflower pressé for Pat. I bought her a hot chocolate with whipped cream and marshmallows on top and settled for a flat white (which seems to be all the rage and which we both prefer to our longstanding favourite capuccino) for myself. There seemed to be several

regulars having lunch, and the atmosphere was cheerful and friendly. The mains were £5 each but I will have to check for the total cost – very reasonable, anyway. I got all the shopping we needed but Pat was frustrated by the limited choice of cards.

After that, we put a few finishing touches to the day's work and Christmas cake and cheese with a glass of port made a more-than-adequate supper.

### **Friday 6 January 2017**

I got up at 6:40 this morning, having slept pretty well. The outside temperature was one degree, and it was dry with a light breeze but heavy cloud which prolonged the darkness to the point where we saw hardly any daylight on the walk.

Before going out, though, it was bite-the-bullet time. The scale showed me as weighing 13 stone 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds, two pounds more than last week, which was two pounds more than the previous week. My best weight was at the end of the eighth week on the fasting diet at the beginning of July: 12 stone 11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds. Since then I have put just half a pound less than a stone back on. I am 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> pounds over the 13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> stone limit I set myself, so something must be done! The fasting diet worked well after the blood-sugar diet, so I need to go back on that – just two days a week of hardship, and I know I can do it.

I planned to repeat yesterday's route with a little more time on the football pitch, but the whole enterprise was slightly disrupted. First, a couple of minutes after setting out, my nose started bleeding quite badly after a gentle blow. I decided to carry on, plugging the right nostril with some screwed-up tissue, but it kept on seeping for most of the walk. Then, still in almost total darkness, I spotted three bright LED lights on the football field, two white and one red, and deduced that someone was giving a dog some advanced training. The red light was on whatever was being thrown and one white one was on the dog, with the third probably a small torch. It looked as if the dog's light was remotely controlled. Anyway, the main point was the the dog was obviously off the lead, so I thought we had better avoid contact. We zigzagged around at the end of the field furthest from the action for a few minutes and then headed home, with blood still seeping from my right nostril. I felt hot and sweaty even before we got back, and wondered whether I was running a temperature.

It was late in the walk that I found the watch stopped at just over two minutes: I had stopped it when my nose started bleeding and had obviously forgotten to re-start it. I decided to score the walk at the basic 30 minutes.

When I took the plug out of my nostril it brought a large clot with it, but the bleeding had stopped. Half an hour or so after getting home, I still felt quite hot and muzzy-headed. A few days ago, when the sneezing and running nose stopped, I was convinced that this wretched bug had run its course, but it seems I was deceived!

I tried to ignore the way I felt until I had brought some logs and kindling in, cleared the grate and laid the fire ready for this evening. This involved a fair amount of axe work, so I had to lock Bailey in the house.

Then, while Pat was showering and shampooing, I made a pot of Aldi's best Colombian coffee and, needing to use up some over-ripe bananas, a big bowl of banana custard.

By the end of all this, I was really ready for the coffee!

Pat was busy tidying away the very last of the Christmas stuff in the front bedroom and wrapping birthday gifts. I did persuade her to have a light lunch with me and we are agreed that once she was finished it would be a chill-out afternoon. I lit the fire, despite 'assistance' from the dog, and everything was set. Dinner will be wings and wedges again, so nothing much to prepare.

## Monday 9 January 2017

Saturday was pretty uneventful, which was good news because this stupid bug flared up again, not knowing whether to be a head cold, sinusitis or what. I just felt grotty – heavy around the eyebrows, snotty, phlegmy and generally under the weather. I still managed to slow-roast a small boned half-shoulder of lamb (half an hour open at 230 degrees and two hours covered at 130 degrees, and to make mashed potatoes, braised cabbage and microwaved carrots with a decent gravy. The lamb was far moister and more succulent than Boxing Day's miserable attempt at pulled pork, as I had hoped. With the banana custard I had made earlier in the week, that made a pleasant dinner – even if most of the banana pieces were too ripe to eat cooked.

I was hoping to feel better after a night's sleep, because Pat was determined to take Tom's birthday presents over to Buxton. In the event, I did feel better – though by no means really well – and managed to drive us over and back. We had a nice few hours with them with a rather improvised birthday tea, and just have to hope we haven't caught the vomiting and diarrhoea bug that has been tormenting them all for a week or more!

Alistair had got the documents from the vet for Bailey's insurance claim.

My right ankle (the 'catastrophic failure') was very sore over the weekend, what with climbing up and down the ladder and heaving all the Christmas stuff about, and I hoped it would be better after a good night's sleep. When I got up this morning, though, it was still quite painful, so I decided to do a short walk for the dog's benefit: the shortest route to and from the football field and one lap of that. The temperature was an improbable nine degrees and the forecast heavy rain had not yet arrived. The dog with the LED on its collar turned out to be the black Labrador we had met before, and Bailey had a nice wrestle with him. We did the whole walk in 22 minutes 12 seconds. I decided that I would put an ankle support on and take an extra Naproxen anti-inflammatory. I really am hoping that the ankle hasn't taken a serious turn for the worse, because I find the idea of going through another fusion with its 12-week recovery – even with the wonderful iWalk – really depressing.

I took the Naproxen with two Paracetamols after breakfast and put on the old favourite splint, affectionately but not very accurately described in this diary as the 'Andy Murray Special' ('Sir Andy' now!) after I had changed our beds and had a shower and shave. I put it on over a compression sock and the combined support eased the pain in the ankle considerably. I have two other supports to try, provided by the Royal Derby's splint workshop back in August 2014.

I scanned the insurance documents and emailed them to Aidan.

Tomorrow I will be starting my second period of fasting in an attempt to stop and even reverse the recent weight gain. Based on previous experience, I don't think I will need the novelty factor to keep myself motivated, so I intend to stick to the old plan: 110 grams of full-fat yogurt, a small banana and a tablespoon of sugar-free muesli (which I discovered I was allowed when refreshing my memory with the Mosley book) for breakfast and a 3-egg frittata with half an onion fried in a teaspoon of olive oil, and 100 grams each of mushrooms and spinach for dinner. The breakfast should deliver 205 calories and the dinner 367, giving a total for the day of 582, comfortably inside the daily allowance of 600 for a man. All drinks will be calorie-free: water, sugar-free flavoured water, black tea and black coffee from getting up to going to bed. As before I will follow this pattern every Tuesday and Thursday. I will need to pop out to the Co-op for bananas, mushrooms and spinach when Pat gets back from her hospital appointment.

After Pat got home, we watched *An Audience with Billy Connolly* – an ancient, fuzzy masterpiece of The Big Yin at his very best in front of a huge audience of big showbiz

names looking amazingly young. Then I sliced up the very small pieces of left-over lamb from yesterday's dinner – a lot easier to carve than when hot. It looked a lot moister than the un-pulled pork! There were also three cold sausages left to stretch the meat out.

Better late than never: at 5pm I remembered that I needed banana, spinach and mushrooms for my two fasting-day meals tomorrow, so I did a quick nip to the Co-op in the dark, the rain and the rush-hour traffic. The splinted ankle was quite painful when I walked on it. The way it felt suggested that a walk would probably be out of the question tomorrow. I hope not, because I need to burn calories as well as limiting them!

Dinner was leftover lamb and vegetables from Saturday with a couple of cold sausages to eke out the meat.

## **Tuesday 10 January 2017**

When I woke up I checked the radiator behind the bed-head. It was hot, so that meant it was after 6am. I waited a little while and then checked the time: 6:25. I decided to stay in bed until 6:45.

I actually remembered that this was a fast day and made myself a cup of black tea.

My guts felt rather bloated and uncomfortable, so I started wondering again if we had brought a bug home from Buxton. My visit to the loo was definitely on the explosive side.

I had left my collection of three ankle supports by the bedroom door: the one I wore yesterday, the other, newer splint and the soft one with the elastic figure-of-eight strap. The ankle didn't feel too bad when I got downstairs, so I opted for the soft support. In fact, the worst of the pain wasn't in the ankle so much as in the foot – the heelbone and amongst the metatarsals. That is moderately encouraging, because it makes it less likely that I will need ankle surgery. I just hope the foot settles down to its usual fairly painless state. Later on it settled into feeling comfortable when I was sitting but very painful when I got up to walk on it.

After yesterday's 'dance in the dark' with the LED-wearing Labrador, I thought it would be sensible to delay the walk until there was a bit of real daylight, so I cleared my email inbox and checked the bank account to pass a little time. We repeated the beginning of yesterday's walk, but when we got to the field I saw that a small white dog (also with an LED on its collar) was off its lead. Bailey wanted to go and chase it, but knowing how aggressive little dogs can be I kept to the asphalt along the side of the field and turned back when we got to the far end. In any case, the ankle was getting quite sore so it suited me to cut the walk short. In fact it cut the time to 20 minutes 45 seconds, about half a minute shorter than yesterday, so my idea of burning extra calories in a fasting week had had a poor start.

I took the blue (recycling) wheelie-bin out and had a small gastric reflux as I was walking back.

As breakfast time came closer, I didn't feel like eating at all. In spite of the earlier explosion I was still bloated, and I felt sweaty and muzzy-headed. My second black tea didn't seem to be refreshing me, so I drank a large glass of water. Getting up from the desk to do this, after writing this update, the ankle had stiffened badly and walking was very painful. I took the soft support off and it improved quite a bit through the morning.

I felt really groggy, but the sinus problems faded into insignificance compared with the gastro-intestinal discomfort. When Pat had left to see Anton and take him to his local hairdresser, I had a black coffee – my usual 8-measure cafetière of Aldi's excellent Columbian blend diluted 50/50 with water, which make the only black coffee

I enjoy, apart from a proper after-dinner espresso. I had another one later on, which went down equally well.

I am writing this at 2:40pm. I still haven't taken in a single calorie, and don't feel in the least hungry. I have just had a black tea, which was more refreshing than the earlier one. The guts feel better than they did first thing this morning, but earlier I had a minor accident and had to sluice my boxers and joggers out!

I decided that I would have a two-egg frittata rather than the three-egg one, and I had no other calorific intake for the rest of the night, so my total for the day must have been well below the target of 600. Towards bedtime I was feeling a little bit uncomfortable, but I was able to settle in bed.

### **Wednesday 11 January 2017**

I had a very unsettled night, with the guts feeling bloated and the bladder getting me out of bed several times, starting at around midnight. Sometime after 8am I decided to go down and make some tea, but after drinking my cup in bed I still felt pretty grim. When Pat got up I decided to give myself a few more minutes, but when I did decide to get up I saw that it was well past 10am – I must have slept for quite a while. I had an unrewarding trip to the loo, not surprising after the very small intake of food yesterday, and I still felt blown up.

I couldn't face breakfast, so I just took things easy until coffee time. I allowed myself two Lotus biscuits in lieu of breakfast so I could take my prescription pills, and I began to feel better after the first cup. The right ankle had been feeling a little better than yesterday so I decided to try some gentle flex/extend and rotation exercises, which definitely improved things. This encouraged me to go out and bring the recycling bin in, which I handled quite well, and a bit later I went out again to split some logs, because tonight is forecast to be cold as well as viciously windy.

By 12:30 I was feeling a lot more human than yesterday, though my stomach still felt unsettled. In view of this I think a fasting day tomorrow might be a bad idea. The stomach still sending me mixed messages, and the foot was still painful each time I got up to walk on it. I had two slices of seeded brown bread, one with Marmite and one with honey, for lunch.

Around 3pm I lit the fire, which Pat had already laid. I was feeling quite sleepy.

I decided to try a pizza for dinner – one of Aldi's excellent 'Carlos' range. Luckily I had chosen a fairly safe one : tomato and mozzarella. I managed a quarter of the pizza, and to my amazement Pat ate half. I washed mine down with the remainder of my bottle of Sicilian lemonade (from the lunch at Sainsbury's last Thursday) and finished with a small banana from a bunch bought for fasting breakfasts. My stomach felt fine, but I wouldn't have liked to put it under any more strain.

### **Thursday 12 January 2017**

I slept well again last night, waking for a trip to the loo at about 6am and again at 7:30. I did two sets of eight repeats of the ankle flex-extend and rotations in each direction with only mild discomfort. I got up just before 8 and felt reasonably comfortable walking on the thick bedroom carpet in bare feet. I was moving fairly well getting downstairs, which was good because I was in urgent need of the loo, where I had a small bout of diarrhoea, after which my stomach felt a little rocky. I decided to try the fasting-day breakfast of 110 grams of full-fat yogurt, a small banana and a tablespoon of muesli. That should kill two birds with one stone: be light on the stomach and have me ready to fast if I didn't feel like having lunch.

The foot is still stiff each time I get up after sitting, but does seem to be improving. I decided to try the newer rigid splint on for today. This is actually a lot easier to put on before the shoe than either of the others, and is quite comfortable to wear. The

elastic and Velcro straps are easy to adjust, too. The foot definitely feels stronger when getting up from sitting, as I discovered when I was summoned to the loo again at 8:45 for another small bout of diarrhoea which left me feeling slightly queasy. I hope this is just the result of not eating much over the past couple of days.

I wish I had had a chance to photograph the x-ray of the right ankle, as I did with the left one, because it is severely deformed. When I first saw Mr Milner all those years ago, I described the ankle as looking as if the leg was falling off the foot, and this is how it looks now. This very strong splint should pull it at least partly back into line, correcting the loading on ligaments and tendons. I should have no trouble wearing it all day for a while.

After my fasting breakfast, I made tea, and sometime after 9:30, when Pat had still not appeared, I took her up a cup of tea. It turned out that she had spent the night from midnight until 5am in the downstairs bathroom, vomiting. This has to be the bug that has plagued Alistair's family, and I seem (so far!) to have got off very lightly. I had a peek at her just before 11am and she was fast asleep.

I cleared out the fire and put the paper in, but there weren't many thin pieces of wood to use as kindling. I decided to have coffee before going out on another wood run. Based on the weather forecast for the next few days, I also need to get my old mountain boots, the snow shovel and some rock salt together in preparation for the beginning of the real winter. And we were running fairly short of milk, so I would need to go over the road for some more.

I would have preferred to delay these errands until Pat was up to avoid the phone disturbing her, but I did go out for a few minutes to cut some kindling and laid the fire ready for lighting.

I went up to check on her again just before 1pm. She was more-or-less awake but still feeling poorly, so I refreshed her water glass and left her to rest.

I repeated yesterday's cautious lunch of two slices of seeded wholemeal toast, one with Marmite and the other with honey.

I am surprised that the bug has hit Pat so hard and has had much less effect on me – so far! We were both exposed at the same time last Sunday. The last time I vomited was when we took my late mother and Pat's late father out to Normandy in 1997 or 1998, probably due to a dodgy bit of seafood – about 20 years ago, so it obviously takes a lot to make me throw up. Also, my immune system has also probably been busy fighting the sinus stuff which has been affecting me for several weeks, so maybe it is on red alert!

I went to check on Pat just before 3pm. She did not stir when I went up the iron staircase and opened the door. I did not disturb her, so went quietly back down and lit the fire, hoping that she might come down and enjoy the warmth later.

She did get downstairs in the early evening and watched some gripping TV for three hours. She didn't eat anything, though. I had two slices of seedy toast, each with a fried egg on top, and felt fairly okay on that.

### **Friday 13 January 2017**

How appropriate that today should be Friday the thirteenth! I spent an hour or so after waking up worrying myself silly about the stupid ankle in particular and how we suddenly seemed to grown old and vulnerable. I got up at around 8:30 just to break the cycle of anxiety.

I suspected that the pain I had each time I got up from sitting yesterday might be due to the newer splint not fitting my badly deformed ankle, so I put on one of my white



fabric ProSport supports, which are a lot tougher than they look. I was much more comfortable in that.

I took Pat a cup of tea, but she didn't stir.

Every cloud...my strange eating pattern this week has taken 3¼ pounds off my depressing weight score last week, leaving me only half a pound over my self-imposed limited of 13½ stone. I have certainly eaten a lot less than I would normally, with no cheese and not a lot of bread. This morning I had my normal breakfast of muesli, prunes and yogurt for the first time since the start of the week.

I heard Pat on the move sometime after nine and went up to check on her. She was drinking her cold tea and talking about getting up as she was feeling a lot better. She still had a splitting headache, though. Shortly after that, she struggled downstairs. She managed a bisuit with coffee but didn't want any lunch. I ate two leftover triangles of pizza and a mince pie without after-effects, so my digestion was obviously back in working order.

When I got up from my office chair after writing the above, I got confirmation of my splint theory: not sharp pain along the outside of the foot at all.

I needed to get some milk, as we were running low, and was trying to decide whether to walk up to the OneStop (normally only about three minutes each way) or drive to the Co-op, where I could lean on a trolley and buy all the other stuff which had accumulated on the kitchen blackboard. I decided on the Co-op.

I had no difficulty driving, walking to get my trolley at the Co-op, doing my lap of the shop while leaning gently on the trolley or getting three bags into the car and then into the kitchen when I got home. By the time I had chopped some firewood and hauled the basket in and crawled around cleaning the grate, setting the fire and lighting it, I felt that my foot had had about enough for the afternoon. I managed to make some tea and Pat did eat a ginger nut.

As usual when the wood-burner is in action, I was up and down to stoke it and adjust the dampers quite a lot, so by the end of the afternoon the foot was really quite sore, but the pain eased as soon as I rested it for a short while.

Pat decided to try a boiled egg and soldiers, while I had a two-egg Cheddar cheese omelette with fried chestnut mushrooms and wilted spinach, accompanied by one of my home-made rolls.

The upshot of all this activity was that I felt a lot more confident and positive than I had first thing in the morning, when I really was in danger of getting seriously depressed.

## **Monday 16 January 2017**

It is only a week since my right ankle became really painful and I had first to shorten the walks to around 20 minutes and then the gastric bug made me feel really rough, stopping the walks for the rest of the week. It feels long – *much* longer, and I can hardly believe that this disruption to my routine has only lasted seven days. This morning was the start of my attempt to get back into my – and Bailey's – regular groove.

Pat was still quite unwell over the weekend, while my guts had more-or-less settled down, so she was eating separate meals from me. On Saturday night I defrosted large carton of leftover spag bol and grated some Gran Padano to sprinkle, but this was a bit of a failure. The food had not defrosted well and was rather dry, so I didn't eat very much. I had made Pat a full portion of porridge, which she ate with some enjoyment, and I ended up rather wishing I had done two! For Sunday I did the full

roast dinner with a large chicken, mashed potatoes, carrots, cabbage and gravy, and she managed a modest serving.

I gave the ankle its first serious test by walking to the OneStop for the paper, and it managed this, though rather painfully. The ProSport support was a definite help.

I had decided to try a walk with our poor neglected doggy this morning, and after a rather late start we got out. I had put the oldest splint on over the ProSport and was able to walk without limping and without too much pain. We went from home, past the shops, to the first turning on the left, where we turned round and went back past our gate to the first turning on the right, where we about-turned and came home, arriving in a miserable time of 12 minutes 41 seconds. This was very much a test, undertaken without getting too far from home, and I hope to be able to build the times back up to something sensible fairly soon.

Later in the morning, we set off to visit Anton. I went because Pat didn't feel fit to drive, which is quite unheard-of. She did manage to make his egg-and-bacon sandwiches, though. We stopped at the OneStop on the way to pick up his milk and cigarettes, and spent an hour with him, at the end of which Pat was very tired. She did very little for the rest of the day, though she did manage to put a tray of mince pies in the oven to bake and spend some time on the PC cleaning out her email and doing a bit of shopping.

After seeing how slow the machine was, I decided to get rid of the McAfee security package that came with the PlusNet broadband package, and see if Windows 10's built-in package would do the job without bringing the machine to a total standstill.

It was a miserable day, damp, grey and foggy, so although it wasn't very cold I lit the woodburner. The cosy atmosphere was a positive incentive to take the afternoon easy.

Later on, though, I walked across to the shops to get some eggs and collect this month's supply of drugs. I had kept the ProSport on after the walk but decided not to put the splint back on – a mistake, as it turned out: the six-minute walk was quite painful and the foot was really sore for the rest of the day.

I did a leftovers meal of cold chicken with reheated vegetables and gravy, with mince pies and tea for dessert. Pat served herself a small portion but managed to eat – and even enjoy – it.

## **Tuesday 17 January 2017**

I checked the time first at 6am, went for a pee and snuggled back down until 7:30, when I decided to get up. The ankle was less painful than it was last night, but still tender. I put the old splint on before the walk.

I decided to repeat yesterday's walk, *with* the splint. I didn't seem to be walking as quickly as yesterday, and I added a few metres on at each turning-point to give me a precise waymark. The time was 13 minutes 10 seconds, about half a minute longer than yesterday.

Changing the PC's security package seemed to have speeded up email downloading (116 this morning!) considerably.

I left the splint on until about 10am, but the foot was getting painful by then, so I decided to try log-basket duty without it, leaving just the ProSport, and was amazed at how much better the whole foot felt, even after laying the fire, chopping logs and heaving a heavy basket in from the garden. I had taken a Naproxen anti-inflammatory (the ones I used to take twice a day but cut down to just one after dinner with the GP's agreement) after breakfast so maybe this had something to do with this...?

Strangely, I noticed a little later that the foot was feeling far better – not totally pain-free but vastly more comfortable. Could it be that whichever bits of the collapsing ankle joint had got out of position have clicked back in? I do hope so!

I went up to the Co-op for a bit of last-minute shopping and I was able to walk round and lug a basket with, among other things, two two-litre bottles of milk – that is around four kilos weight – and around a kilo of butter with no significant discomfort. This is weird – and a bit scary, because if the pain can go away so quickly it could come back just as fast!

Dinner was cold chicken (slightly overcooked on Sunday) and bubble-and-squeak (pretty much of a disaster). Pat was making a cake for my 74<sup>th</sup> birthday tomorrow and wasn't very bothered, but I was quite hacked off.

The foot was still feeling fairly good, so fingers crossed...

### **Wednesday 18 January 2017**

I got up at 7am this morning so we could get a good start with the cooking for the party Jackie is hosting for me. After feeling better yesterday afternoon, the foot was quite painful this morning, and despite my best intentions I decided to abort our walk – the same 'route' as yesterday – at the end of the first leg, giving a miserable total time of just eight minutes.

After breakfast I opened the lovely presents I have received from Pat (a big *Private Eye* book and a year's subscription to the magazine, with a really nice binder), Steve and family (a monster biography of Bowie with a recommendation from Tony Visconti, who worked with David on and off from 1969 to the last album, *Dark Star*) and a very classy casual shirt, like a polo but with long sleeves and in a stretchy knit, from friends Sue and John. My email trawl also revealed a generous Amazon gift voucher from daughter Sarah.

We were a little concerned about leaving Bailey for the longest time ever. We left to go to Jackie's, about half an hour's drive away, at about 11:30, and Bob drove us to Catcliffe, a suburb between Sheffield and Rotherham, for lunch at Whitby's enormous fish-and-chip restaurant. A pint of draught Kronenbourg (originally from Alsace but probably brewed somewhere in England now), a plate of delicious crisp whitebait and a 'small' cod and chips set me up for the afternoon. Then we went back to Jackie's, where she and Bob had prepared quite a lot of cold stuff for tea and we added the birthday cake Pat had cooked for me, plus sausage rolls and mince pies. Their lovely daughter Bex arrived with husband Andy, who has similar problems to Anton's but not as severe – he is very deaf and has appalling visual limitations, yet he manages to work as a trainer at a Sheffield gym – and their delightful daughter Anya, who is a real character. We had a long drawn-out tea together, culminating in a chorus of *Happy Birthday to you* (me) and Anya and me blowing out the one candle.

We left sometime after 6pm and were very relieved to find Bailey on good form, insanely glad to see us. He had a slight accident, doing a small pee on the kitchen floor while jumping up the greet Pat, but otherwise seemed none the worse for his long, lonely vigil.

The two parts of this week's *Silent Witness* and the news took us to bedtime. The troublesome right ankle had behaved reasonably well, allowing me to drive both ways and do the necessary walking.

Seventy-four. Bloody hell!

### **Thursday 19 January 2017**

I was awake on and off from around 5am this morning, but feeling totally comfortable in bed, thanks to my two gorgeous good-down pillows. Two or three loo-visits

interrupted my rest, and after the 7:30 one I decided to stay up and see whether a walk would be workable. The right foot was feeling quite sore and tender to walk on, so I was in two minds as I hobbled downstairs. I decided to try the newer rigid splint, which felt quite good, but the decision about the walk was taken out of my hands by a nosebleed, the first for a few weeks. Like the previous ones it was fairly copious and didn't stop by itself – I had to plug the nostril with a cone of kitchen roll. It started after I blew my nose: the inside of the nostril felt wet, so I wiped it with a finger wrapped in kitchen roll, which came away with a red spot on it. Our favoured Plenty brand is fairly abrasive, so maybe I should use softer tissues. The trouble is that my nose-blows are pretty violent and I can blow a hole right through normal tissues.

So, no walk first-thing this morning, but there is really no reason – apart from entrenched habit – why I shouldn't do one later.

In the event, I didn't take Bailey out today. I went to Sainsbury's for a fairly short list of groceries which nevertheless took me from one end of the store to the other and back again. The car was showing '50 miles until empty' on the way into town, and I am never sure how accurate this figure is (I have no intention of running until the fuel runs out just to test this!), so I abandoned my plan of going to Aldi first, my usual sequence because our silly road system makes this a much shorter trip. Having filled up with diesel, I had a brainwave: I was pretty sure that a right-turn on what would normally be the way home would give me a short cut to Aldi, and I was right. This was a smaller trolley-load, but still quite hefty.

Pat was still pretty unwell, so we filled the afternoon with the first three episodes of *Tutankhamun* and watched the last one after butter chicken and rice (with just a small Beck's beer in my case).

The PC is working noticeably faster since I uninstalled the McAfee security package – particularly obvious when downloading the morning's huge batch of junk email (176 this morning!).

The replacement handheld unit for the Vax cleaner arrived today and worked well. It also worked differently – and more sensibly – from the first one, suggesting that there had been a fault from the start.

I kept the new splint on all day and it was more comfortable than before. However, when I had sat for a long time and got up the foot was still very painful to walk on.

### **Friday 20 January 2017**

I didn't get up until 7:30 this morning. The right foot didn't feel too bad, so I put just the ProSport support on. I didn't feel confident enough for a walk, though, and I would definitely use the splint if I had to use the leg much. Another disappointing weight: 13 stone 8¾ pounds, 1¼ pounds up on last Friday but two pounds less than a fortnight ago.

It was mild this morning but forecast to get frosty by evening, so I would probably need to visit the log-store again today.

Trump's inauguration today. Is this the beginning of the end of the world as we know it – or just the end of the world? His name is Trump; it rhymes with 'dump'. And 'chump'.

Once I started moving around to set up for breakfast, with a quick trip outside to take some bottles to the recycling box, I realised that the right foot was quite tender when weight-bearing, and that the whole leg was aching. Fatigue from yesterday, or what? The pain isn't specific to the ankle, and wanders around the foot through the day. Is this good news – or what?

I put the splint on after setting up for breakfast, and the foot was feeling quite a lot better after a longish sit-down. I was walking fairly confidently, so I could definitely have tackled a schedule like yesterday's, which I had seriously doubted earlier.

By 11am I was walking even more comfortably. I wonder whether the splint might be pulling the wildly deformed ankle back into a more natural line and therefore improving weight-bearing, rather than just stabilising it.

I went out into glorious sunshine sometime after midday to split some longs and bring a heavy basket-full in. The right foot stood up to that perfectly well. It really is very odd! The logs from last-year-but-one are running down quite quickly, but I think what's left with last year's load will get us through this winter with plenty to spare.

At round 2:30pm I took some empty jam jars, which had been cluttering up the booze shelf in the utility room, down to the shed, where we store them ready for the next batch of jam, jelly or marmalade (I have just finished the last jar of my 2008 Seville orange marmalade, which had kept perfectly at room temperature, even when the jars had been unsealed for years – a *real* preserve!). On the way down the garden I noticed rather a lot of Bailey-poops on the lawn, so I went back down with a poo-bag over one hand and a medium-size carrier in the other. When I had cleared it all, I estimated that the bag weighed well over two kilos! That is what happens when both of you have been off-colour for a couple of weeks.

The right foot coped very well with the poo patrol.

At around 3pm I ordered 4kg of Seville oranges, because I have a sudden urge to make (and eat) a new batch of [my magical marmalade](#). This will require 8.6 lemons (I will use 9 as I like plenty of flavour), 12.5 litres of water and 6.5kg sugar.

I lit the fire in the middle of the afternoon as the temperature outside had fallen below freezing.

The Donald Trump Show made compelling but depressing watching. All those wild promises! I wonder how much freedom the politicians and civil servants will allow him...

Wings and wedges, mayonnaise and good red wine were on the menu for tonight. Naughty of me, but I chose the heaviest box of wings in Sainsbury's yesterday. Oh yes: to finish, Aldi's excellent and very cost-effective answer to Magnums, the ultimate choc-ice.

In the middle of the evening my right foot felt very uncomfortable, so I took the splint, the sock and the ProSport support off to let it breathe. It felt a lot better when I put everything on at the end of the 10 o'clock news.

Shortly before bedtime I blew my nose rather enthusiastically and started another bad nosebleed. When this didn't stop, I plugged the nostril with rolled up tissue. I still needed a tissue to catch the leakage for quite a long time. On the way to bed I replaced the paper plug with a ball of cotton wool, hoping that this wouldn't leak onto the bedclothes. When I pulled the plug out it trailed a very long, firm blood-clot, so the report of slow clotting I gave to the GP was obviously exaggerated!

## **Saturday 21 January 2017**

I tried to get back to sleep after an very early trip to the loo, but I gave up at 8:25 and got up, putting a ProSport support on the right ankle. As soon as I got downstairs I added the new splint, and the foot felt reasonable with this support.

When I went to the bathroom I removed the cotton wool plug, and to my amazement there was no trace of blood on it. The residue must all have been combined in the clot.

Pat was still quite unwell this morning, coughing a croaking quite a lot. I found her a few Jakeman's cough sweets, hoping they would be enough to keep her going until tomorrow morning because she can't stand the far-more-effective Fisherman's Friends.

With the weather looking a little threatening towards 1pm I cleaned the fire out, laid a new one and went out to load a basket of logs and split some for kindling. It said something for the state of my right foot that I carried in a basket which I could only just lift without pain.

I kept the splint on until about 9pm, by which time it was becoming uncomfortable. The foot felt fairly good without the extra support. Fingers crossed that wearing the splint for long periods may have some real benefits.

### **Sunday 22 January 2017**

I managed to walk across the road for the papers and some milk this morning. Four litres of semi-skimmed and half a tree's worth of *The Sunday Times* made quite a load but the right leg and foot stood up to the strain quite well.

Pat was still very fragile, so we had another lazy day. I had to go out to split a few sticks of kindling, make coffee for Aidan and Donka when they came over in the afternoon and light the fire, but that was about the total of my exertions!

### **Monday 23 January 2017**

I have been feeling rather ashamed of my idleness. The three little walks I did with Bailey at the beginning of last week totalled a miserable 34 minutes, so I decided to get up early – 6:45 – this morning and try to do a bit more. With the temperature at -1, we did a loop round the local residential streets and clocked just on 20 minutes according to my Casio watch (I had forgotten to put on the stopwatch!). There was some pain on the top of the instep and a sort of bruising feeling under the heel bone, and with about ten minutes to go the knee was adding its protest. I wasn't sorry to reach home, but felt relieved and encouraged. If I can sustain this for the week and then add five minutes each week I will soon be back up to the recommended minimum of half an hour a day and may be able to build back up to forty minutes.

We had a long drawn-out visit to Anton's, meeting his social worker, who fitted a new barrel with a thumb knob on the inside to the front door lock, to stop Anton locking us all out by leaving his key in the inside of the lock – a bizarre 'feature' of modern cylinder locks. He then took us to Lloyds Bank to try to convert his account to a current account, which would allow all his bills to be paid by direct debit. This turned out to be only the beginning of a long process. It was well past 2pm when we got home.

On the way back I called in at the village surgery to collect the blood-pressure monitor which the doctor had booked for me, and also to ask if any of the twelve blood-tests taken on the 30 December showed any problems. I was assured that none did. Obviously I am in better condition than I thought!

Once we had had a very late lunch I went out to split some logs, then laid and lit the fire.

Pat was feeling really under the weather after this morning's efforts and – more – the stress of dealing with Anton's problems, and wouldn't eat anything at all at dinner time. So I had wholewheat spaghetti with Sacla pesto and plenty of grated Parmesan, followed by a slice of my birthday cake with cream.

## Tuesday 24 January 2017

I was awake at around 5am but was perfectly comfortable and relaxed. I felt quite rested when I decided to get up at 6:40.

With the ProSport under my sock and the new splint over it, and with a clear sky and the temperature just on zero, we did the same walk as yesterday. My right foot was less than comfortable but worked well, though the right knee felt painful and rather weak. I am hopeful that doing a full week of five walks, and then resting the legs for two days, I might get on the way to recovering my normal strength. This time I was wearing the stopwatch, which showed 18 minutes 18 seconds at the end of the walk.

After the walk I decided I would try wearing the splint today without the ProSport support, which has quite a crushing action on the metatarsal bones.

I got an email this morning telling me that my Seville oranges would be delivered this afternoon. Marmalade time! The quantities I calculated (4kg oranges, 8.6 lemons, 12.5 litres of water and 6.5kg sugar) will be far too much for even our largest pan, and probably too much for our current stock of jars, so I think I will have to make the marmalade in two batches, possibly doing the preliminary cooking in one and splitting the solids and liquids, or maybe not because it would be difficult to get an exact split. Decision made, then: two batches from the start. After all, my 2008 batch was only three-quarters of the size of this one!

I did what should have been a quick shop at Sainsbury's between coffee cups 1 and 2, but it seemed to drag on forever, and I must have bought at least twice as much as I had on the list. After hiking around without the ProSport support, I was convinced that I was more comfortable wearing just the splint.

After coffee, and then lunch, I did my usual log duty, laid the fire, cleaned round the stove lit up. As there was a mediocre food programme on TV and Pat was still feeling pretty limp, I made our afternoon cuppa earlier than usual and we settled down to enjoy the fire's glow and goggle for a while.

The oranges arrived sometime after 4pm, before we were ready to settle down, and were stashed out in the cold garage to keep them fresh. The parcel weighed 4.5kg.

I cooked a bag of Aldi scallops and a pack of Pommes Dauphinoises (also Aldi) for dinner. Not awfully impressive, but they plugged a gap. Between us we almost finished my birthday cake.

I took the splint off after dinner and felt surprisingly comfortable. Even getting upstairs was no problem.

## Wednesday 25 January 2017

I had a little battle with myself this morning. I was half-awake for quite a long time in the early morning but by 6:30 I still hadn't wakened completely. I was blissfully comfortable and still felt very sleepy, but because of the long-established weekday routine I felt a strong compulsion to get up. In reality, with Pat rarely getting downstairs before 9 o'clock and this week's walks only taking around 20 minutes I had plenty of slack in the system. I could probably steal another hour in bed each morning and still get everything done. Habit prevailed, though. I got up at 6:40 and walked across the bedroom with no discomfort whatever from the right foot. The splint had been off since dinner last night and everything felt fine.

As it turned out, it was a good thing I did get up then, because by the time I had brewed a pot of tea my bowels were issuing a red alert. I did manage to clean my teeth before dropping the joggers, but it was a close thing! My bowels seem to be alternating between constipation and the opposite. Just old age?

Not quite so fine once we got into the walk, though. We repeated Monday's route and finished it in 18 minutes 9 seconds, nine minutes faster than yesterday, but the foot was moderately uncomfortable and there was still that odd ache and weakness around the right knee.

Our Internet connection had been off when I got up and was still off when we got back. This only happens rarely, but when it does it usually sorts itself out. It is shocking how vulnerable we are to the loss of the connection, though – I felt really anxious when I couldn't access BBC news and weather. I had a listen to the telephone dialling tone just after 8 o'clock and it was coming in short bursts, so there was obviously a problem with the line. I dialled my mobile and this rang normally, so I had no idea what was going on. I couldn't download emails or check the bank account, so my routine morning tasks were totally disrupted. I switched mobile data on and after a long delay my banking app managed to access my account – but showed no change from yesterday, so that wasn't very rewarding! The BBC weather app was unable to update. The news app did manage to download the top story but didn't update any of the others. Pretty poor!

I keep having slips of the brain, thinking I will Google to try and find out what is wrong – but of course I can't Google! Eventually I searched through the overloaded tray on the desk and found the PlusNet setup guide, which was conspicuously lacking any phone numbers. However, one of the letters inside finally yielded one

I started preparing the fruit for my first batch of marmalade before Pat came down for breakfast (about 9:30) and continued intermittently through the morning, somewhat hampered by trying to get through to PlusNet, our broadband provider. I got hacked off just waiting passively through many minutes of profoundly nondescript music and the regular recorded announcement in a Sean Bean voice and accent (they are a Sheffield company and proud of it), so I put the phone in speaker mode and, with a damp j-cloth within reach to wipe my messy hands when I finally reached a human being, carried on quartering oranges and lemons (two kilos of Seville oranges and six unwaxed lemons), collecting the many pips in a j-cloth bag, slicing the skins as thinly as possible – I think I averaged between one and two millimetres – with my freshly-sharpened and deadly Japanese chef's knife, and putting them in the pan with the requisite amount of water. For a batch that will fill ten or twelve Bonne Maman jam jars, with interruptions, that took me until 12:30. I had almost finished when I eventually got to talk to a PlusNet adviser, who told me that there was a major fault on BT's fibre-optic network in our area which might take as much as 48 hours to fix. Unbelievable!

The fruit has to soak for 24 hours and will then be boiled until the skins are tender, before the sugar (real preserving sugar this time) is added and the marmalade is cooked to setting point and put in jars from the oven..

With jars and lids in the dishwasher, I brought the wheelie bin in and did a poo patrol round the lawn. Bailey had had a productive few days since the last one. Later, I put the jars in the oven, ready to be preheated tomorrow

Despite feeling very rough and having spent most of the morning ironing, Pat decided to make a batch of leek and potato soup after lunch. That made be a very adequate dinner for us tonight with a savoury fougasse, a gift from Alistair and Julie (who works at Waitrose), I think.

Late in the evening it was Pat who spotted that the LED strip on the PlusNet hub had changed from amber to blue, probably about 20 hours since the outage started – by far the longest we have ever had before. We grabbed our phones, signed back on to the network, and checked that all was well. We would sleep easier tonight!



## Thursday 26 January 2017

I got up to go to the loo at about 6am and couldn't resist opening the bedroom door a crack to have a peep at the glow from the hub, which is bright enough to light me down the stairs. It was still blue! I was really comfortable when I got back into bed and decided to allow myself a bit of leeway. I like to listen to the 7 o'clock news on Radio 4, but surely if anything really important happened it would be discussed on *Today* long after the bulletin had ended. So I stayed in bed until 7 o'clock – a real luxury for a weekday.

Considering how long I was on my feet yesterday, the right foot felt pretty good. I am now convinced that the splint is working well but the ProSport support was doing more harm than good.

I ran '[THE UK's No.1 Broadband Speed Test](#)' and got really excellent results: a 71Mb/s download speed and 16Mb/s for uploads. It's a pity my PC's [erformance doesn't reflect this!

I took my time, and we didn't get out for the walk until 7:40. Google told me the local temperature was -2 and it felt like it. I put my gloves on when we started, but after taking them off for poo-bag duty about halfway round the same route as yesterday I didn't bother putting them on again – good circulation! I got in a slight tangle with the stopwatch after the stop, but I reckon the walk took about 17 minutes 40 seconds, a little quicker than yesterday, so we were back in time to hear the whole of the 8 o'clock bulletin. With the deterioration of the BBC News channel, Radio 4 is now the only source of news and opinion I can take seriously. The foot wasn't exactly comfortable, but the discomfort was quite bearable.

I had another heavy-on-the-feet day to look forward to, cooking the fruit for the marmalade, dissolving the sugar, cooking to a set, bottling and capping – and clearing up the debris.

After breakfast I went out to cut some thinnish wood for kindling and fill the basket with (I hoped) enough logs to keep the fire going from lunchtime to bedtime. The temperature here is forecast to be -1 degree through the day cooling to -2 in the evening. I cleaned out the fire, emptied the ashes and used the replacement Vax cleaning, leaving the stove ready for lighting.

I then needed to print labels for my marmalade. The file for the 2008 batch was still on the computer, but I had a slight problem. The wonderful vector graphics package I have been using since the Acorn Archimedes days, *Xara X*, doesn't like the more recent versions of Windows and is almost unusable with Windows 10 (I did buy the version I use on behalf of Derby NHS back in about 2001, so I can't guess which version of Windows I was using then!). However, I managed to open the label file and edit the year, but there was no way I was going to print it from Xara itself. However, I remembered that the package has a huge range of export formats, so I exported the labels as a TIFF bitmap and printed it using *PhotoShop Elements*. Job done: 40 labels. I will put in a support request to Xara.

Next: 48 hours' accumulation of mostly junk email...

By just before 11am I had got through all the routine admin nonsense that had been paralysed by the Internet outage. What a relief!

I started cooking the peel by bringing it to the boil at 12:55 and turned it down to a simmer at 13:10. By 2pm the peel was tender and translucent so I turned the gas off, spooned and stirred the sugar in slowly and when it was totally dissolved turned the gas back on and brought the liquid to a fast boil. I started temperature checks using both the old alcohol sugar thermometer and the digital one, and at 3:15pm both showed the target temperature of 106 degrees Celsius, so it was time to put the lids in a large bowl covered with boiling water and take the jars out of the oven. I filled 14

standard Bonne Maman jars, then sieved some into another to make and shredless marmalade for Pat. This left some thicker residue, which I bottled separately. A little later I could hear the lids popping as the contraction of cooling air sucked them down, and later still I could see no movement in a jar when I tipped it up. Mission accomplished.

Rather than make another batch (how much marmalade does one couple need?) I decided to freeze the remaining 4.5kg of oranges.

Pat was feeling really bad this afternoon, so we had some more of her leek and potato soup with fougasse for dinner. I used the stick blender to turn the soup into a creamy one and added some milk to counter the slightly excessive salty flavour.

### **Friday 27 January 2017**

I got up at 6:55 this morning and managed to dress quickly enough to get to the kitchen in time for the 7 o'clock news. I put the splint on as soon as the kettle was on. It was a very cold morning – -2 degrees according to Google – and there was a moderate fog, so not very inviting.

The sight of all the marmalade jars lined up in the kitchen made me quite proud. I can't believe how much time I have spent this week standing at the worktop with more-or-less no complaint from the dodgy foot.

Not a very encouraging morning, either: my weight was up to 13 stone 11¼ pounds. My 30-pound weight loss on the 1 July had now been reduced to 16 pounds. I really should knuckle down to the fasting régime again.

Considering the amount of time I have spent on my feet this week, the right foot (or ankle, or whatever) was feeling pretty good. As we set out on the same route as on the past four days I felt I was walking well – not fast, but with a reasonable stride. With no interruptions today, we did the circuit in 17 minutes 24 seconds, 16 seconds faster than yesterday's best and 54 seconds faster than Tuesday (Monday was an estimate). I did get a sudden strange sharp, stinging pain on the outside of the ankle which started about halfway round the route. It felt more like a bite on the skin than anything structural, and had faded by the time we got home. In the first full week back walking, the total time is 1 hour 31 minutes. I intend to increase the distance, and therefore the time, week by week, and hope eventually to get back to 40 minutes a day.

When the current problem with the right foot was at its worst, getting up from a chair was always a bit fraught, because for the first few steps the pain in the heel would be quite severe. This has gone completely. I am fairly convinced that using the splint to correct the relative positions of the lower leg and the foot, which had become very distorted, is the factor that has brought such a considerable improvement. Whether the deformity had just reached a critical level, or what, I can't be sure, but as a theory it makes sense. If this means wearing the splint every day, that will be a small price to pay for getting rid of the pain.

This has been a busy week, and I am really thrilled about how much I have done, so I plan to have a fairly lazy day today. However, I did take twelve jars of marmalade down to the garden shed for long-term storage! Some will go for Christmas presents to family members.

We had leek and potato soup for lunch, with some of my own bread. I opened a jar of marmalade for a tasting: it was very thick and firm, and the taste was excellent. Well worth all the hard work. It will be interesting to see how the flavours develop with keeping, and whether the marmalade can be stored open at room temperature without going mouldy, like the 2008 batch.

Later on I lit the fire and then walked up to the shops for milk, coleslaw and lottery tickets. The right foot had finally decided to punish me a little for all I have put it through this week. The pain was fairly gentle compared with what I was putting up with a few weeks ago.

Dinner was wings and wedges with the coleslaw I'd bought, followed by Aldi's choc-ice lollies.

### **Saturday 28 January 2017**

I managed to stay in bed until just after 8am and set up breakfast with brown bread in the toaster, the big jar of slightly questionable marmalade (what was left in the sieve after straining off some clear marmalade for Pat) and Pat's own jar on the table. I even managed to soften a fresh pack of Lurpak slightly salted in the microwave without destroying it (one minute on the simmer setting)! Each jar got the respective eater's seal of approval.

I spent some time figuring how to deal with the backlog of pocket money for Ewan and Tom, which I had held because I didn't want to put it in their accounts, to which they have no access until they are 18. I resorted to sending it to Alistair via PayPal and trusting him to give it to the boys when needed.

I also did some pretty smart stuff to download some of Barney's band pictures from FaceBook which were not available for saving by the normal means. Techie Gramps isn't dead yet!

Pat felt up to making a chocolate cake for Anton's birthday tomorrow, which is a good sign, but she is still quite under the weather.

Jacket potatoes with baked beans, grated supermarket Cheddar and brown sauce made an easy, nourishing dinner. I had Christmas cake for dessert.

### **Sunday 29 January 2017**

The site of the sharp pain on the outside of my right ankle looked like a bite, with a tiny spot of broken skin in the centre of a fairly large area of inflammation. After my shower I put a plaster on it to stop the splint rubbing on it, and this relieved the discomfort.

We went to see Anton on his 64<sup>th</sup> birthday. Pat's sister Jackie and husband Bob were there before us. We took Anton to his regular pub (in the sense that, when his support workers take him out to shop they sometimes take him there for lunch) for lunch and had a very pleasant couple of hours together. Jackie and Bob decided to take Anton home so we came straight back for a lazy Sunday afternoon.

### **Monday 30 January 2017**

I felt very lethargic when I came to this morning and allowed myself to wallow in bed until 7:15. I pulled myself together once I was downstairs with Bailey, and decided to try a longer walk for this week. We went along our street and round to the Village Hall (I will *not* call it the civic centre!) and the football pitch. We walked straight along the edge of the field and then turned onto the short dimension, at which point Bailey decided to stop for a poo. I stopped the watch but discovered, when we had done a full lap of the field and got back to the poo-stop site, that I had not restarted it. It showed 9 minutes 15 seconds, so I restarted it and took a fairly roundabout route home. The watch showed 25 minutes 57 seconds when we got back. That is over five minutes longer than any of last week's walks, and a correct timing would probably be over 30 minutes. I will do the same walk again all this week and correct today's time.

The right foot was aching from the start of the walk, and quite badly by the end, but not severely enough to hamper me. I had not worked it hard over the weekend, so I have no idea what the problem is. The bite, if that is what it is, didn't cause me any discomfort.

Today was quite a lot milder than the last few had been, so I didn't have to visit the wood store and swing the axe.

By mid-afternoon the foot was feeling quite comfortable, but by the time I had made dinner it was rather more painful. Still, the splint seems to be doing its job fairly well.

## **Tuesday 31 January 2017**

I got up at 6:45 this morning after a comfortable half-hour of half-sleep. It was a gloomy, grey morning with fine rain all over the en-suite window – not very inviting. However, Google gave our local temperature at 5 degrees. I opted for a sweatshirt and my colourful ski jacket.

We did the same route as yesterday, and even with three poo-stops I managed to stop and start the watch correctly. We met the friendly basset hound again, but otherwise we had the football pitch to ourselves. Walking due east on the way home, the wind was in my face, presumably funneled between the houses, because the BBC weather app was forecasting south-easterly winds for us, so that looks about right. The total time for the walk was 31 minutes 55 seconds, so I changed yesterday's time to this week's target of 30 minutes. There is a loop which I can add to this route which will probably take it up to 40 minutes. Then maybe the weather will allow us to go back to the old lane walk.

The right foot was moderately painful by the time we got home, but nothing to worry about. It felt fine by lunchtime. We had a visit from Pat's best friend Sue and then an accidental phone-call from her sister Jackie's son Nick, with whom I had a very long chat following his angry contributions to our family chat on *WhatsApp* about the abominable Trump (rhymes with 'dump') and some of my equally disgusted responses. This had got a bit fraught because Pat's niece-by-marriage, who lives in Texas, was defending Dreadful Donald quite aggressively. Our conversation was only brought to a halt by my bloody bladder, but Pat took over and had one just as long with her favourite nephew.

I took my last two blood-pressure readings before dinner: quite low at 136/72 and 137/76. I must remember to take the kit back to the surgery tomorrow morning. My readings are mostly towards the high end of the ideal pressure band with a few slightly over, so probably not bad for my age.

## **Wednesday 1 February 2017**

My early morning was weird. I woke up a lot, pee'd a few times and every time I looked at the time it was earlier than I expected. I got up just after 6:55 and made it downstairs in time for the news. The Trump saga continues...

I have been having fairly severe itching down my right shin. It could be a reaction to the elastic straps on the splint or even because I have reverted to loose socks for a while. I decided to put some support socks on this morning.

There had been quite a lot of rain through the night but it had more-or-less stopped by 7:30, when we left for our walk. We did the same walk as Monday and yesterday, with three poo-stops which I had to handle with Wilko's miserable little bags. I did forget to re-start the watch after one, but not for long. We had a brief encounter with the basset hound: a quick sniff at each end without excitement and it was Bailey who walked away. The ankle was aching but not feeling under stress, but the knee of the same leg was quite sore with a mild weakening effect on the leg. I was quite glad to get home, in just under a minute longer than yesterday at 32 minutes 43 seconds.

Updated 13:56 24/1/20

One of my diminishing number of teeth has been painful when chewing anything hard, like the pumpkin seeds I foolishly added to my muesli instead of throwing them away. If it doesn't calm down I will need to book an overdue dental check-up.

I have been thinking about going to the market for some fish, but with the leg as it is the long haul up the hill might be a bit much. However, I did need to take the blood pressure kit back to the surgery. I had intended to walk across to the precinct for this but I needed a few items of shopping from the Co-op, after which I decided to have a try at getting a haircut. I struck lucky this time: there was nobody in the chair at all when I looked in the barber's shop, so I got into it straight away. Grade 2 on the top, 1 on the back and sides and a grade 1 beard trim, with an interesting chat about guitar-playing, all for a fiver.

Pat had been feeling a little better than yesterday, so it was no surprise to me that she had started ironing as soon as my back was turned. She suffers from the delusion that as soon as she feels a little better she can go straight back into full-throttle action. She always does this when I am out – very sneaky.

Later on I did walk across, convinced that the OneStop shop would have Bird's Eye fish fingers, considering that it serves a huge housing estate with hundreds of kids. To my amazement it didn't even have a spot in the freezer for what must be the most popular and long-established frozen foods ever. So I went home for the car and back up to the Co-op.

## **Thursday 2 February 2017**

I got up at 6:45 and had tea made by the time the news came on Radio 4. We repeated the walk we had been doing all week. The right foot and knee were aching and felt a bit tired, but we walked quite uneventfully until a man came out of a side-turning with a Labrador and a Cocker spaniel on leads when we were a few minutes from home. Bailey went crazy wanting to get to them, so I decided to cross the road. They were going our way, so I took a little loop round the shopping precinct to allow them to get well ahead, which calmed Bailey down completely. The diversion took the time up to 33 minutes 47 seconds, just over a minute longer than yesterday.

The dodgy tooth is still painful, so I think I should ring the dentist today. I couldn't see a card on our overcrowded pinboard, but I remembered getting an email reminder quite a while ago, when I was still getting myself back together after ankle surgery. I did a search on my *Outlook* inbox and found it, with a link to an online booking system. So I have an appointment at 10:45am a week today. Meanwhile, by chewing carefully, I managed to get through breakfast without letting a pumpkin seed near the tender tooth!

Although I still have quite a lot of the bread I made for Boxing Day in the freezers, I decided to check on the ferment in the fridge. It hadn't been as badly neglected as I feared, because the date on the box was the 2 January, exactly a month ago. I gave the contents a good stir, and it smelled quite fresh, slightly sour and not really yeasty. I stirred 100 grams into the same amount of water and then added the same again of Allinson's awesome flour. Will it wake up? No problem if not as, unlike my now-abandoned sourdough cultures, I have fresh sachets of the Allinson's yeast stashed away. At 11:30, just as I had begun to give up hope, the first two small bubbles were about ready to pop. And by bedtime the ferment was bubbling away quite enthusiastically.

Pat has finally decided that she needs to see the doctor for her cough (which she now accepts is a chest infection) and the urinary infection which has been coming and going in parallel with the respiratory one. We tried to find an appointment online but there was nothing for ages, so she phoned the village surgery. This now has one of these infuriating call-centre systems which had her waiting over half an hour, a

very similar experience to mine with PlusNet when the Internet went down a couple of weeks ago, with endless repetitions of inane music and pre-recorded announcements. We decided to go to the walk-in centre which is attached to our practice's main surgery a few miles down the road. We got there before the afternoon session started and were about fifth in the queue. By the time the door opened at 2:30pm there was a long queue behind us. Pat was called in less than half an hour and found herself seeing one of the practice GPs actually in the surgery (less important cases see a nurse practitioner in the centre). He turned out to be the fourth most senior partner in the practice, which has no less than fourteen. He recognised the seriousness of the infections and prescribed a strong antibiotic – a challenge as she is allergic to penicillin and sulphonamides.

This whole experience left us furious, and I intend to write a strong letter to the senior partner (who had the pleasure of giving me a rectal examination a year or more ago!), with copies to the practice manager and the chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group. Our village surgery used to be excellent, with receptionists who answered the telephone and plenty of appointments available. Now it seems to be falling apart. It is no surprise after this that so many people go to A&E with complaints that are neither accidents or emergencies, with the trickle-down effect this has on bed availability and ultimately contributes to holding up surgery. We are lucky to have a walk-in centre, and a primary care centre at the hospital just down the road, too.

### **Friday 3 February 2017**

I woke quite suddenly from a vivid but totally inane dream in which stepson Aidan had asked us to pick him late in the evening up at a nonexistent station (I think it was called Morton) at which a London train was improbably stopping and drop him off at a friend's house where a party would be in progress.

I checked the clock at 6:25am, rolled over and waited until just after 6:45 before dragging myself reluctantly out of bed.

Google had our temperature at 9 degrees but the outside thermometer said more like 7. No need for a sweatshirt under the ski jacket, either way.

I put the splint on (I wore it from getting up to going to bed yesterday with no discomfort) and did some neck, shoulder and lower back exercises, as I have been very stiff lately. I don't think I mentioned here that I had done this a few days ago.

We took the same route for the fifth time, meeting the two Labradors on the field and having a friendly wrestle. Then, on the way back, Bailey suddenly leaped into an opening, from which a black cat erupted and tore off. He tried to chase it and I had quite a fight to stop him. He really hates cats. A little further on we passed a very secure front garden in which our passing triggered a huge barking session from a large dog and a Jack Russell. Again, I managed to drag Bailey away and we finished the walk without further delays in 35 minute 28 seconds, giving a total walking time for the week of 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> hours.

I put the yeast ferment, which was now very bubbly, back in the fridge at 10:30am. Interestingly, there was no yeasty smell – just a nice fresh and slightly sour odour. It will probably be a couple of weeks before I need to make bread again.

I have been trying to find plenty of recorded TV to keep Pat occupied. It is an excuse for me to doss around as well, of course.

Our fairly tranquil day was interrupted by a message from Anton's care service saying that his electric kettle was not working and they didn't know if it was a fuse or loss of a main circuit or what. Also Anton had been unable to get cash from the ATM

or to pay his bills. Pat was really in no condition to deal with this. We tried contacting Anton's social worker (at around 4pm on a Friday afternoon? Dream on.)

We decided that in spite of Pat's condition we would have to go over. I retrieved our last electric kettle from the garage loft and put this and my little electrical tool box in the car and we set off, stopping for milk and cigarettes (in the new plain packs). Anton seemed okay, so I had a look at his kettle. The plug fuse was blown so I replaced it. When I switched the kettle on there was a loudish pop from inside it and the whole kitchen ring main died. I found the circuit breakers and switched the ring back on, then tried out kettle. Apart from the fact that this one had a blown plug fuse, it worked, and after some juggling – and with some silly jokes about International Rescue and 'Thunderbirds are go!') we left Anton with a working kettle.

When we got back we managed to contact the out-of-hours line for Sheffield Social Services, and Pat had a couple of long but pretty fruitless conversations about Anton's plight.

Instead of wings and wedges, I had egg and beans on toast and Pat managed a bowl of porridge. We will have tonight's menu tomorrow.

### **Saturday 4 February 2017**

I stayed in bed until 8:30 this morning then came down and made tea, which I brought back to bed for both of us after letting Bailey out. Pat didn't want to stay in bed but took a long time getting herself together, so I came down and made myself toast and marmalade.

Pat still wasn't feeling like doing much, so after I had split and brought in two baskets of logs we had a fairly lazy day, watching the rest of the Icelandic thriller series *Case* on the All4 catchup app.

Halfway through this, went across the road for coleslaw and milk, then laid and lit the fire. At some point, while crawling around the hearthrug, I must have put some unintended stress on the right leg and foot, which suddenly became very painful.

Once the series had finished I went through and got the wings and wedges prepped and in the oven. We finished by 7pm, with three of the twelve wings left for my lunch tomorrow.

### **Sunday 5 February 2017**

Pat managed to sleep through me bringing tea up at 9am (having let the dog out), winding the headrest of my bed up and getting myself, my phone, my Kindle and my tea organised. I had a good look at the BBC news app and downloaded today's *Observer*. I was quite happy staying put and reading the news and the paper until well after 10, when she finally surfaced to a stone-cold cuppa.

The morning was, by our standards, totally chaotic. It was after 10:30, our normal coffee time, but we decided to have a cup of tea and Pat had a bowl of Oatibix to buffer her morning medication. We gave Bailey the biscuit ration he would normally have had when we had our first coffee. I had one of the last surviving mince pies with my tea. Quite soon after that we had coffee with our and Bailey's usual biscuit rations. Around 1pm I topped up the log-basket and laid the fire, though it felt mild enough for us not to bother. I lit the fire anyway at around 3pm and we had a really cosy evening.

I had found a container of cooked minced beef in the outside freezer, together with a small quantity of mushy peas, so I defrosted both, leaving them ready for a cottage pie – just some spuds to peel, microwave and mash later. I got it all together by about 6pm and it made a delicious meal. The extra good news is that there was plenty of

pie left for tomorrow night – we'll just need some more peas, and I will need to get out for a bit of shopping..

## **Monday 6 February 2017**

I think I was awake for quite a while this morning before I decided to get up at 6:45. In fact, I remember feeling the radiator when it was cold, which would have been before 6 o'clock. Nevertheless, I was very comfortable and after two weekend lie-ins the idea of staying put was very attractive. But this morning was going to be special.

It was a beautiful clear morning with Google giving our local temperature as -1 degree. The ground was bone dry with no slippery patches, so we set off in the opposite direction from the last few weeks to do the loop round the back of where we live. We met up with last week's route at the village hall in 12½ minutes and did the lap-and-a-bit round the field, meeting a friendly little dog – a Labradoodle pup, maybe – twice for a sniff and a little wrestle. On the way back to the road we met the basset hound, but with his master rather than his mistress. I was having trouble with my glasses misting up, because by now I was quite hot and sweaty and the lenses were very cold. On the way back down the road, as the hazy sun was coming up above the houses, I took the glasses off for a couple of minutes to air-dry the lenses.

As we came through the front gate the stopwatch showed 39 minutes 14 seconds, very close to the 40-minute target. Looking back at last week, on Friday we took 35½ minutes to get round the shorter route, so this morning's time was pretty good.

The right foot was very painful for most of yesterday, in spite of having the splint on all day, as I wasn't sure I would manage the walk today. As it turned out, the foot had recovered well overnight, and I only had a little pain around the outside of the sole and heel.

I also seemed to be developing the chest infection which has been giving Pat so much trouble – certainly an irritating cough.

I did a run to Sainsbury's and Aldi without any problems before lunch. When I got back I cleared the fire out and laid it ready for a cold evening. I lit it at about 5pm.

We finished the cottage pie tonight. After shopping I have the makings of a lazy lasagne and my signature dish of chicken thighs (there are nine in the box) roasted in Italian sauce. That should sort us out for the rest of the week.

By the end of a cosy evening in front of the fire it was clear that I now had a similar bug to the one that has been plaguing Pat for several weeks. I am coughing more, I feel hot and sweaty and I am desperately tired. My nose is quite runny, too.

## **Tuesday 7 February 2017**

I slept well except for being wakened by a coughing fit fairly early. If I had been up, I would have sucked a Fisherman's Friend to get some menthol vapour into my tubes, so decided to put a big smear of vapour rub in each nostril, which must have helped because I wasn't disturbed again. I first checked the time at something after 6am. At that point I found the idea of getting up early and walking the dog fairly uninviting, but I got up anyway at 6:45. There was rain on the en-suite window, which made the prospect even less attractive, but by the time I got downstairs and let Bailey out the rain had stopped.

A cup of tea and my ablutions later, I decided that I would try the walk, which has a couple of bale-out points. The walk was uneventful, though the ground in the field was softer than yesterday and quite slippery, and to my amazement we finished the full route in 37 minutes 52 seconds, one minute and 22 seconds less than yesterday (I have just worked out how to make my spreadsheet subtract one time from another!), with only a couple of gentle coughs. I was quite hot when we got back and



couldn't wait to get the ski jacket and sweatshirt off. I took two paracetamols and a decongestant before sitting down to write this.

Pat was down early this morning, eager to get some washing under way. As soon as we had had our after-breakfast tea I took the little Vax cleaner (working better than it ever did with the original handheld unit) upstairs to change our sheets, pillowcases and duvet cover (always a wrestle) and give the carpet a quick going over.

Then I had a look at my Visa card website and was amazed at how little money I seem to have spent now that Christmas excesses have all been paid for. I hope that this is the month when I finally get a grip on everything.

Just after midday I took Bailey for an extra short walk because we had a birthday card for our wonderful French daughter that needed posting. Apart from a slightly fractious encounter with a spaniel, the 15-minute walk was very pleasant in the sunshine, which had raised the temperature from this morning 4 degrees to almost 10. This also meant that there was no need to light the fire today.

I baked seven chicken thighs in a jar of Aldi tomato and pancetta pasta sauce and served this with wholewheat tagliatelle (this after listening to James Martin's pronunciation of the name - tag-lee-ah-telly rather than tal-ya-tell-eh. I am not sure how he squeezed this into a programme about France and its food. He claims to have lived and trained there as a chef, but his pronunciation of French words is atrocious).

### **Wednesday 8 February 2017**

I am writing this between 8:30 and 9 o'clock, feeling very hot and sweating quite freely after our walk in a temperature of 4 degrees with a light but chilly wind. Is this the bug at work, or just my lack of fitness?

My amazing internal clock failed me badly this morning, waking me at 7:02am. The Vick's-up-the-nose trick had worked well again: I wasn't disturbed by my cough at all and slept really well.

The outside temperature was 4 degrees again, under a dull grey sky. We did the same route as we have all week, but took longer because of pauses to greet some other dogs and diversions to avoid meeting some others. Bailey made friends with a nice young border collie called Stanley who had some impressive innate sheepdog moves. The watch said 40 minutes 47 seconds when I stopped it at the gate. The right foot and knee had felt quite comfortable from start to finish.

My cold bug (or whatever it is) was feeling quite bad through the morning. In particular, my throat felt sore, so I tried a good long gargle with my antibacterial mouthwas (the same active ingredient as Corsodyl but less than half the price from Wilko). This really seemed to help.

Following the good news about my blood test results, I had a call from the surgery this afternoon (I'll bet they found it easier to phone me that Pat found it to phone them!) to tell me that my blood pressure readings were all comfortably within acceptable limits. So I still don't know why I get so knackered!

I decided to serve the chicken thighs with rice tonight, adding a second jar of the Aldi sauce (any left over can be used with pasta).

At about 5:30 I checked the freezers and discovered that all the home-made rolls I baked for the Boxing Day Family Bash and which hadn't been eaten had shrunk to just four rolls – enough for two days' lunches. Time to wake the ferment up and get a sponge on before I go the bed tonight...

## Thursday 9 February 2017

The inner clock failed again this morning. I woke up slowly – the only way I can describe it – and when I finally persuaded myself to check the time it was 7:05am. I gave myself a minute to recover from the shock and then got up and dressed. I had to remember that my denture and electric toothbrush head were in Steradent, not water, because I have a dentist appointment this morning (usually I only use the frothing cleanser on Friday or Saturday nights so that it will be broad daylight before I have to fish the teeth out).

The sponge for my bread batch was well risen. I had to think hard how to time the various stages of making the dough around my 10:30 appointment.

It was another dull, grey morning and the temperature was just 2 degrees, yet I didn't need gloves for the walk. My circulation must be pretty good. We did the same route as yesterday and met Stanley the collie on the field, which both dogs managed really well. The right leg and foot were moderately painful, but nothing I couldn't manage. Our time this morning was 39½ minutes.

The schedule was crazy, but I managed to get my dough made and all its kneading cycles completed before I went to the dentist (no treatment needed unless the troublesome back tooth gets sensitive again. If so they will be happy to remove it.). By 12:30, 24 rolls were proving on top of the cooker with the oven at 230 degrees. And two of the remaining four from the last batch were on there to defrost. Something odd seemed to have happened with quantities: the dough was quite a bit heavier than previous batches, but it handled all the better for that. We will see when the rolls come out of the oven.

The first tin came out at 2:30pm. The rolls were plump, round and a lovely shade of brown and sounded hollow when tapped on the bottoms. I can safely say that they were the best-looking rolls I have ever made. The smell of freshly-baked bread was delightful until 4:45 when the second of two large bags, each containing twelve rolls, went into the inside freezer. We decided to have omelettes for dinner, so it was impossible to resist the temptation to try the new bread batch, in spite of there being two left over from last time. I defrosted them on the top of the kitchen radiator – maybe not the optimum method, but probably better than the microwave. The crusts were quite crunchy, the crumb lovely and soft and springy and the flavour perhaps a little less obvious than in the previous batch.

It was another afternoon for a fire, so I got the woodburner up and running before our 4pm cups of tea.

## Friday 10 February 2017

I was guilty of wishful thinking at bedtime last night, telling Pat how much I was looking forward to Saturday a lie-in in the morning. I was quite disappointed when she reminded me that it was Thursday and not Friday!

I was awake before 6 this morning and heard the radiators warming up. Then, at around 6:30, I felt as if my left nostril was running, which it had been earlier, and found that it was bleeding quite heavily. It had left quite a stain on my bottom sheet. I rolled the corner of a tissue up and plugged the nostril, and then lay on my back. There was no sign of leakage.

I had been feeling as if I was losing a bit of weight for a few days, and was delighted to find that I had lost 3½ pounds since I weighed myself two weeks ago. Not bothering to eat so much? A bit poorly lately? Extra exercise? Who knows.

I felt quite grotty, with a thick, phlegmy cough and a very irritable nose, but I got up at 7 o'clock and managed the usual routine.

When I pulled the paper plug out of the nostril in the bathroom, I was surprised to see hardly any blood. The nostril was running watery mucus. I decided to risk the walk, with little expectation of finishing it, or of finishing it in a decent time.

The weather was dull grey, with the temperature at 2 degrees according to Google and no perceptible wind. Shortly after we set out, the occasional tiny snowflake started falling in front of us, and further on along the route I noticed a light springly on the parked cars.

The right leg was not encouraging, with some pain in the outside edge of the sole and on top of the instep, and some in the knee as well. However, we got right round the new route, with three doggy encounters: a snappy one with what looked like a very young German Shepherd (which left a tuft of its hair behind!), two nice one's with Stanley the collie and one with the basset hound. We got back in 40 minutes 25 seconds – the second slowest time in the week, bringing the third full week's total since I got back into the routine to 3 hours 18 minutes, about 35 minutes more than last week. I was deeply relieved to reach home, because the last few hundred metres had been quite painful.

In spite of this, by 10:30 I had split two baskets of logs and brought them in, cleaned the woodburner out and laid up the new fire. Pat was doing her usual crazy trick of thinking 'I feel better (in spite of a horrific coughing fit at breakfast time which she blamed on inhaling a bit of cereal) and diving into violent housework.

Just before 11 o'clock I walked up to one of our two village Post Offices, chosen because the little shopping precinct is on the same route. I posted some letters and, on the way back, collected my medication and bought some Fisherman's Friends from the pharmacy, and got some gently cough sweets and a lottery ticket from the OneStop shop. The walking time was about 18 minutes. Every little helps.

I have been looking at the paperwork for the pet insurance following the attack on Bailey in Buxton, which took place on the 11 October last year. His age is given as 5 years 2 months 11 days. This would give his date-of-birth as the 1 August 2011 if my calculation is correct.

### **Saturday 11 February 2017**

I really did get my Saturday morning lie-in this morning, but I was in no fit state to enjoy it. I felt feverish, I was sneezing and coughing and my nose was running. Whatever this blasted bug is, it is certainly going right through its repertoire of symptoms! I was definitely the poorer of the two of us this morning.

I let Bailey out, did my ablutions and brought two cups of tea at 8:30. We had a lazy half-hour or so reading and then I had a shower and a shave. Breakfast was porridge and toast (with my new marmalade, of course). At about 2pm, after finally finishing my reading of last Sunday's *Observer* (yes – on Saturday!) I went out to split some logs. Then I built a large 'cheat's lasagne', using 500 grams of mince from our local butcher and three jars of Aldi's lasagne sauces – enough to do at least two dinners for us. When this was finished I cleaned the woodburner and laid the fire. By 3pm it was ready to light – and I was ready to stop. I spent the rest of the afternoon reading the third of Gordon Ferris's Douglas Brodie series which I discovered as a Kindle Daily Deal recently. This one is about tracking down the worst of the Nazis who had managed to sneak into Scotland. It gives a pretty balanced version of the Jewish story at the end of the war, portraying the Zionist fanatics and the long-time Scotting residents.

I am really pleased with the behaviour of my right leg today. It is almost painless.

## **Monday 13 February 2017**

I felt really rough yesterday. When I got downstairs I had a bout of nose-blowing and coughing that sounded like ripping canvas. I did the minimum necessary to get the fire going and, later, to turn the failed lasagne into something more-or-less edible for dinner.

I didn't think a walk would be on this morning, but I didn't want to deprive poor Bailey of his exercise – or break my own pattern completely, so we did a shortened version of last week's route: instead of doing a full lap of the field when we had walked the length of it, we about-turned and took the shortest route home. Allowing for minor errors with the stopwatch on two poo stops, we recorded 24 minutes for the round trip.

I felt better than expected when we got home, though I was sweating copiously and coughing quite a bit. My right eye – the one that works – has been sore and itchy ever since this bug started, and it took a few minutes after getting up this morning to clear it of whatever goo it had generated through the night. After the walk it was just watering freely, and still itching. I think it could do with something antibacterial.

Pat was desperate to get over to see Anton if we could manage it (I had faxed last night to tell him she would be over but two attempts had failed with a 'ringing but no answer' message), and I needed to visit town later for St Valentine's Day shopping. Anton was very angry that we had not told him we were coming by fax, but when we explained that his fax wasn't working he calmed down. As if he had anything else to do...! I put his phone/fax through its paces as a phone and nothing worked. I tried to use first BT on the Web and then BT via phone using my mobile to report the fault, but was unable to do so. As soon as we got home, I did the same via our landline and was told by the polite computer that his services had been suspended due to non-payment of his bill – again! His support service seems to get more useless every week. I texted and emailed updates to his social worker but got no reply. Presumably someone will wake up eventually.

On the way back I walked right up the town centre for a pee before going back down to Holland and Barrett for muesli ingredients and to M&S for a dozen roses and WH Smiths for a Valentine card, fairly confident that she would be back at the car before I got to Marks. She was, and I managed to smuggle my purchases into the boot before driving us home.

She had bought quite a lot of goodies, including prepared Coquilles St-Jacques which would save me doing it all from scratch. She also had a couple of options for dessert, and I had a bottle of Prosecco in the fridge, so I hope we will have a really nice day.

I got the roses into the garage without drawing attention (except from the dog) and put them in a bucket of water.

For tonight, a jacket potato each with a few baked beans, grated Cheddar and HP Sauce was more than enough.

## **Tuesday 14 February 2017**

I had more than one nasty coughing fit during the night, in spite of the Vick's up the nostrils, and was very reluctant to drag myself out of bed. I managed it at 7:30. I really did feel rough and my right foot was quite painful. I doubted that I would be up to a walk, but I didn't want to disappoint Bailey. I got the roses out of the garage and put them on the table with the card, where Pat had left my card and what looked like a bottle bag last night.

It was after 8 o'clock when we set out. It was a beautiful but cold (around zero) morning, with a little hoar-frost on the asphalt pavements, but we managed a

shortened version of yesterday's route, leaving out the walk along the field and back, in 19¾ minutes.

At around 11am, while Pat was in the shower, after doing a scavenger hunt on Amazon to find some movies for a lazy day – I ended up adding at least a dozen to the watch list! - I managed to cut some kindling and do a massive poo patrol on the grass, collecting several pounds of Bailey-poops.

We started watching *Bridget Jones's Baby*, which was very funny, but had to stop when our friend Sue popped in. By 2pm we had not had anything to eat and had about half an hour of the movie to finish.

*Absolutely Fabulous the Movie* was a real disappointment – silly, chaotic and just an opportunity for loads of celebs to indulge themselves to no real end. We gave up just past halfway through and watched James Martin's tour of France.

We had aperitifs with nuts and bits, followed by M&S Coquilles St-Jacques with Prosecco (Pat's laced with the French elderflower liqueur I bought her for Christmas).

### **Wednesday 15 February 2017**

Pat was going out on a girlie shopping spree with Sue this morning, so she asked me to give her a call when I got up. Miraculously, when I decided to get up at 7:15 she rolled over and looked at the clock all by herself.

I had had no problems with The Bug through the night – no coughing fits, sneezes or runny noses. I felt a lot better than I did last night. However, the right foot had been a bit painful while I was cat-napping before I got up, and felt a little dodgy when I walked on it. I decided to put the splint on before going downstairs as Patrica would not be disturbed by the sound of ripping Velcro. The right leg was feeling a little weak when we went out and I seemed to be walking more slowly than I have recently. I was disorganised enough to forget the stopwatch, so I just committed the time – 7:43 – to memory when we set out and settled for 20 minutes as our time for a repeat of yesterday's reduced route.

As soon as Pat set out I drove up to the Co-op for milk and various doggy bits. I also got some salmon fillets, which I would normally be buying from Darren in the Wednesday market.. Once back, I made an extra cup of tea and settled down with watch three episodes of *Vikings* back-to-back. I had two coffees, each with a biscuit, and gave Bailey his ration during the gaps between episodes. At some point I had a sneezing fit in the kitchen and suddenly felt a little 'wrong' – a swimmy head, mostly. I had coughed a few times during the morning but the coughing hadn't got out of control. When I cough it does feel as if there is phlegm that needs shifting, but nothing comes up. I have been waiting to get a sample for several days to see if the colour suggests a bacterial infection.

We had fried salmon fillets with sauté potatoes and green beans for dinner, which made a pleasant change.

### **Thursday 16 February 2017**

I got up at around 4:30 for my only night-time pee and had a longish period of cat-napping after daybreak, finally checking the time after hearing Bailey shaking himself downstairs. It was 7:20, so I got up immediately.

The right foot felt more comfortable than it has on most mornings. As a precaution, I put the splint on as soon as my socks were on.

It was a beautiful morning with a clear blue sky, the early sun peeping over the roofs and no wind. The ground outside was wet so there had obviously been some rain during the night.

We went back to the slightly longer route for our walk, along the side of the field and back again, because the grass looked too muddy for a lap, before looping in the direction of home. This added about five minutes, giving us a time of 25 minutes 40 seconds. There is work to do to get back to the minimum of 30 minutes. We met a grizzled old greyhound: Bailey was fine but after a few seconds the other dog got snarly.

I had a busy morning. The first job was to pack all the jars and bottles that were overflowing from the two crates we hide outside the back of the kitchen into two disused French shopping bags and take them to the bottle bank outside the Civic Centre. Oddly, the clear glass container was very full but the green glass one had plenty of space. Then I decided the time had come to try and get some of winter's grime off the car. I hoped the pressure washer would do the job, but after spraying thoroughly and using the DirtBlaster fairly successfully on the alloy wheels I ended up with a bucket of warm soapy water and a sponge, followed by the pressure washer to rinse. The weather was kind and I didn't get too cold in spite of flying spray.

After lunch I had a short walk across to the shops for Pat, who had opted to cook tonight. She did pan-fried cod fillets with French beans in a lovely garlicky tomato sauce, served with sauté potatoes left over from last night.

But first, just after 5 o'clock, I had an errand to run. Alistair had bought a mountain bike for parts on Ebay, and miraculously the owner only lives ten minutes from us! Things were made interesting by the fact that he lives on a fairly new development – newer than the maps on our satnav. I found his address on Google Maps, but the street maps are so pale that it is really difficult to find roads. I managed in the end, though, and found his house easily. He brought the bike round to the (freshly washed) car and between us we manhandled it into the back, which I had cleared and is a surprisingly big space. It was a tight squeeze, but we managed, and I got it out single-handed when I reached home. It is now docked in the garage and we hope Alistair and the gang will visit on Sunday take it home to Buxton.

### **Friday 17 February 2017**

I didn't get up until 7:30 this morning, which was cloudy but dry and bright, and comfortable at around 8 degrees.

The right leg felt rather weak and painful, which was hardly a surprise after yesterday's antics. The good news was that I had somehow lost another pound since last week – 13 stone  $6\frac{3}{4}$ , so actually under my self-imposed target and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  pounds lighter than the shock weight just three weeks ago.

I was doubtful about a walk but didn't want to disappoint poor Bailey, so we set out on the same route as yesterday but cut out the walk along the edge of the field and only clocked just under  $19\frac{1}{2}$  minutes, giving me a total for the week of just under 1 hour 50 minutes. - rubbish after last weeks  $3\frac{1}{4}$  hours.

After breakfast I hauled the big Sebo vacuum cleaner outside with its long extension hose, and gave the inside of the car a good going-over. By the time I had finished it was time for coffee and I could relax and enjoy my feeling of virtuousness.

I got an Annual Tax Summary from HMRC this morning. I suspected that their figures were a bit wide of the mark, but when I checked they were close enough to my rough totals. Having seen the total gross and net income figures, I must say we're pretty well off for a couple of septuagenarian pensioners, thanks to good pension from my long time in teaching and much shorter time in the NHS.

Before lunch I set out to pay this month's unusually small credit card bills. The MBNA Visa payment went like clockwork, but I had a battle with the Sainsbury's Bank website, which would not allow me to pay my MasterCard bill. In the end, I tried

switching from my default web browser, *SeaMonkey*, which has been doing the job perfectly well for months, back to the ponderous *Internet Explorer*, and the site worked normally. *Windows* moves in mysterious ways!

After a good range of meals this week we were back to the old favourite for Friday night: 800 grams of chicken wings with potato wedges and mayonnaise. Sadly, though, we have run out of Aldi's answer to Magnums so dessert had to be changed. I melted some milk chocolate and poured it over my helping of Aldi's Cornigh ice-cream, but it set into hard lumps before I could really enjoy it.

### **Saturday 18 February 2017**

I got a *really* long lie-in this Saturday morning. I had no idea of the time when Pat got up to make tea and told me it was after 9 o'clock. I struggled to focus on my mobile to read the news – pretty much a no-news day for once – while drinking my tea, and could happily have rolled over for another hour. However, Pat wanted to get going with catering for tomorrow's visit from Alistair and his gang (he wants to collect his bike!) so I dragged myself to full consciousness and got downstairs by 9:30.

The week's exertions had left my left foot feeling pretty battered, and by the time I had done a fairly major shop at the Co-op and our local butcher, I was glad to sit down. I am quite puzzled by the pain, which doesn't seem to be focussed on the ankle but is mainly in the sole of the foot and around the metatarsal bones over the instep. If Mr Milner decides that the 'catastrophically failed' ankle replacement needs surgery, which would mean a bone graft to replace the implant and then a full fusion, I can't imagine what else he might find.

I did a thorough job downstairs with the big vacuum cleaner at around 3pm, leaving the kitchen until Pat finished her baking, probably tomorrow. She was making Alistair's favourite meal: minced beef and onion pie. Later on I peeled about 5kg of potatoes for mashing tomorrow, made two pints of custard to my personal recipe – equal quantities of whole milk and double cream thickened with cornflour, tinted with yellow colouring and flavoured with good vanilla extract and sugar. Then I made cheese and mushroom omelettes for dinner.

I also scanned the second batch of 50 or so pages of *The Songs of David Bowie* which I have promised to send to stepson Steve. There are quite a few still to go in spite of having passed the 100 mark.

### **Monday 20 February 2017**

I was up first yesterday morning, but not until around 9am. We had tea in bed and read the news on our mobiles. I also downloaded *The Observer* on the Kindle, before having a shower and a shave. The day was busy with more preparations for Alistair's lot (in my case making a mountain of mashed potato) and then entertaining them. Al was very pleased with his £25 bike, which he dismantled so it would fit in the boot of their RAV4. The meat pie and vegetables were delicious, as was the custard, though something went awry with the syrup sponge.

I tried leaving the splint off except for my morning walk to the shop, and the ankle seemed to stand up very well, but towards the end of the evening it became very painful indeed. Once I had woken sometime after 4am this morning it prevented me getting back to sleep, and even with the splint on I decided a walk would be risky. However, the splint did improve things through the morning.

Pat went off to join Anton and his social worker on a visit to the main Post Office in Sheffield city centre. This was to finish setting up a proper current account with the Post Office Bank so that his bills can be paid by direct debit and his money will be available at every sub post office. Once I had stripped and made our beds – quite strenuous because our poshest duvet cover is a real wrestle – I had a lazy morning

watching three episodes of Vikings – really decadent. It looked as if there was only one episode left to watch – number 9 for some reason.

I was seriously thinking of going down to the walk-in centre attached to our practice's main surgery, where I took Pat a couple of weeks ago, but the virus really isn't causing me much grief now. I'm still a bit congested, but then I was before I got this bug, so for the moment I will let things lie.

Pat had a fairly horrendous morning with Anton but she got a little retail therapy on the way home.

I finished scanning the 24 song scores in the Bowie book – a grindingly repetitive task that nevertheless required considerable concentration – and emailed the pages for *Suffragette City* to Steve with a list of all the songs.

We finished the mince-and-onion pie with lots of vegetables followed by some tasty pastries Pat had brought back from Sainsbury's.

## **Tuesday 21 February 2017**

I was totally comfortable after waking this morning, having gone for a pee earlier, I think. My body, lying face-down with my arms under the pillows, the left foot hanging over the end of the mattress and the right knee bent, was pain-free (even the right foot) and warm, and felt as heavy as lead. I could have stayed there forever, but I managed to persuade myself to get up at 7:15.

The problem foot was slightly painful when I put weight on it, but not bad. I put the splint on as soon as I got downstairs and decided to try a walk. We did the shortest version of the current route in just under 20 minutes, but by the time I was halfway round the foot was very painful. I was very relieved to get home and take the splint off, as I suspect it might actually be causing some of the discomfort. I had a look for the old one over the weekend, but couldn't find it anywhere.

Having just written that, I looked over my shoulder from my office chair and spotted it sitting on top of a pile of boxes! I put it on and at first it seemed to ease the discomfort. Oddling, though, after a long period sitting down over two helpings of coffee the leg./foot was very painful when I got up at around midday. I decided to take the splint off for a while and the pain seemed to ease. It looks as if both supports are doing more harm than good, leaving me with only the option to walk around without any protection, which I did for the rest of the day.

I just updated my bank-account spreadsheet and discovered to my delight that March is the month when I get two state pension payments, because this is the only payment I get which comes four-weekly instead of monthly. As this is the month when I expect to recover from all the Christmas outgoings, that is a real bonus. I think I will use it to put the balance of £500 from the Buxton vet's bill back in the savings account as I don't think we are going to get it from Bailey's insurance.

I reported a good weight-loss last Friday, and I have come to the conclusion that this is down to almost stopping lunch. This isn't something I have done deliberately: I just haven't felt hungry at lunchtimes so I haven't bothered to eat, so I am doing a sort of moderate version of fasting and certainly taking in quite a few calories less than normal, which would be a roll with butter with at least a generous helping of various cheeses and often some cooked meats too, followed by a pear or maybe some jam on what, if anything, is left of the roll. I am still having a Belgian spiced biscuit with each cup of morning coffee, which presumably helps me to skip lunch, and usually a Ringtons triple chocolate cookie with my afternoon cup of tea. Today I had just two cups of tea at lunchtime. If it is as easy as this to lose weight, I will skip lunch as often as I can manage!



Pat had an appointment with the local hairdresser this afternoon, so I decided to watch what I thought would be the last episode of *Vikings*. It turned out that I had watched episode 9 and Amazon had lined up season 2 for me. I watched the first episode of that instead. It's quite good stuff – not as wonderful as Alistair led me to believe, but engrossing.

We had two packs of pre-prepared seafood which Pat brought back on Monday - breaded calamari and fish gougons – plus a bag of king prawns from the freezer which I warmed in garlic butter. I put the splint on and went over to the kebab takeaway for a bag of fries. To be honest, the seafood was all a bit disappointing. I had my second Rhum Baba and Pat had a nice juicy peach for dessert.

### **Wednesday 22 February 2017**

I had another long comfortable spell awake but relaxed before getting up. I say 'relaxed' but I was worrying about this wretched right foot. I have gone through a few bad patches with it over the past months, but it has usually recovered. This time, though, it seems to have had an irreversible setback, so do I contact the hospital and try to get an early appointment or continue to hope for improvements day-by-day?

It didn't feel too bad when I got downstairs, so I decided to give the soft foam support with the strong figure-of-eight elastic strap for this morning's walk. At first it felt reasonable, but by the time I reached the point where we turn off our road it was becoming quite painful. I seemed to be walking on the outside of the sole, which ties in with the distortion of the ankle, and creating pain on the outside of the ankle. I decided to walk as far as the junction with the main road and then turn round. We were home in a miserable 10 minutes 50 seconds.

Looking back at the walks spreadsheet, we did walks of roughly forty minutes the week before last, with a week's total of 3 hours 20 minutes. Last week was closer to 20 minutes a day, with a total of 1 hour 50 minutes. This week looks like continuing the downward trend, which is bad news for my fitness programme.

I had a look back at the diary entries from the week before last. The walks were all positive, with mention of pain only on the Friday, so this spell with the foot has only lasted just under two weeks so far. It feels a lot longer.

Like the ProSport, the soft support squeezes the foot, pressing the metatarsal bones together, and this is painful. I took it off as soon as I sat down and the foot felt better straight away. That left me tossing up between the old splint and the new one, which I have decided makes the foot painful, so I put the old one for an extended test. It was feeling quite comfortable after a couple of hours.

The main obvious differences are that the new splint has just a fabric strap under the heel, which is not very comfortable, but the old one had its own sole-plate with thin foam on top, and the new one has very powerful elastic straps but the old one has more gentle non-stretchy ones. The old one has a foam pad over the outside ankle bone, which I replaced by a home-made one when it got really worn and the rivet was pressing against the bone.

After sitting here doing my admin the ankle was more painful than when we got back from the walk. This ties in with a bad spell I had a while ago when the first few steps after getting up from a long sit-down were always very painful.

My last check-up at Derby was on the 22 August last year, so the next won't be until at about the same time this year.

We needed some shopping, so I went to Sainsbury's and then Aldi late in the morning. I seemed to be walking a little awkwardly on the right foot, possibly because my foot was raised a few millimetres by the splint's sole-plate, making my right leg a

fraction longer than the left, but there was very little pain. After our 4pm cup of tea the foot was still quite comfortable. It will be interesting to see what sort of walk I can manage in the morning.

By 5:30pm I had done all the preparation for tonight's sausages, mash, peas, corn and onion gravy.

We are threatened with storm Doris (!) tomorrow, with heavy rain and winds up to 57mph for most of the day. Today was very windy, but the wind dropped towards evening. The calm before the storm...?

### **Thursday 23 February 2017**

I got up just before 7:15 after another long, comfortable spell following the last visit to the loo. There had been plenty of raindrops on the window but the rain seemed to have stopped when I went to get my denture. The trees were blowing visibly but not too violently. The right leg and foot felt fairly good.

I put the old splint on as soon as I got downstairs. Bailey went out for about ten seconds and came straight back in, but as soon as I took his harness off the hook he went into his usual excited state.

I can't say the foot felt totally pain-free, but it wasn't bad. The whole leg was moving rather weakly and clumsily, but I decided to try the shortest of our full laps, which we used all last week. We got round in 21 minutes, quicker than the two slowest times last week but a little bit slower than the other three, from a range of 19 minutes 23 seconds to 25 minutes 40 seconds. Considering the fierce westerly wind and the heavy rain that started shortly after we got going, this was not bad. Storm Doris had obviously arrived!

When I had been sitting for a while and got up, the foot felt rather battered, which was disappointing after yesterday's optimism, but by late morning it was more-or-less pain-free.

At around midday I suddenly remembered that the hinges on the downstairs loo seat needed adjusting to stop an eerie creak. A pair of pliers, a can of WD-40 and 20 minutes later it was sorted.

Sometime after lunch I began to feel very sleepy, so I decided to have a shower and a shave. It was only when I was back down that Pat noticed that storm Doris had demolished one of the fence panels between our garden and our neighbour Craig's. The opening was close to Craig's hen house, which would be a problem with the dog. Freshly showered and in clean clothes I went out in a howling gale to drag our last spare 6-foot by 6-foot panel out from behind the shed and up the side of the garden, with Doris doing her best to wrench it out of my hands. Somehow I managed to stand what was left of the demolished panel up and put the new one behind it, reinforcing it with a paving slab and two very heavy concrete planters. To my amazement, my bad leg was none the worse for this ordeal, thanks to the old splint. With the wind beginning to drop at last, the temporary repair was looking good and I was feeling good.

My foot was still working well when I switched off the TV and prepared for bed. Doris seemed to be on her way to bed, too, so I hope tomorrow will be peaceful and that we will manage a decent walk.

### **Friday 24 February 2017**

It was a beautiful morning, bright, clear *and windless* with the temperature at about 3 degrees when I got up at 7:15. Storm Doris had obviously either passed on to mainland Europe or faded away.

I haven't mentioned it here but I have started doing a very gentle set of right-ankle exercises before getting up: eight flex-and-extends, eight rotates-right, either rotates-left and another eight flex-and-extends.

I put the old splint on as soon as I got downstairs. The leg didn't feel brilliant, but I suppose that would have been too much to hope for after yesterday's wrestle with the waterlogged fence panel and the monstrously heavy concrete planters. The ankle area was moderately painful and the whole leg felt achy and rather weak, so I was walking rather clumsily by the end of the walk. We did the same route as yesterday in almost the same time at 21 minutes 9 seconds, giving me a week's total of 1 hour 12 minutes, not bad for four walks but way shy of my target: five 30-minute walks totalling 2½ hours.

When I got back I realised that I had not weighed myself after my trip to the bathroom. I had had a mug of tea weighing about 200 grams, so the shocking weight of 13 stone 10¾ pounds was probably between a quarter and a half pound high, but it is the same as on the 6 January, a pound lighter than on the 27 January and 4 pounds heavier than last Friday. Too many lunches? Or too many 'proper' meals?

After breakfast I had a look at my temporary fence repair. It had held up well, but it needed some extra support. I found some stout polypropylene rope in the garage, hoping that I could anchor a piece to *something* at each end when it was stretched across the new fence panel. First, though, I wanted to get the panel flat back against the fence, but I discovered that there was an old concrete ornament behind it. This was monstrously heavy, but by lifting the lighter end onto a brick to reduce friction I managed to drag it out. Then, with the panel tucked cosily up against the old one and the planters heaved in behind it as tight as possible, I had a look at anchorage points. There was a very thick ivy stem against the panel to the left and a stout bit of trellism fixed to the one on the right. Remembering my boy-scout days and later my sailing exploits on the River Fal in Cornwall, I anchored the rope with a round turn and two half hitches to the ivy stem and one with three half hitches to the trellis, pulling it as tight as I could. All I need now is a big strong partner with whom I can get the new panel into the grooves on the concrete fence posts.

When I opened the garage door to put the spare rope away, Bailey shot out. I had obviously shut him in earlier. If I hadn't needed to get in again he could have been there for a long time!

Still feeling lethargic and having trouble shaking off the bug, I did a search for supplements specifically for people over 70 years old. The only ones I found offered a separate blend for men and women, so I ordered some online from Holland & Barrett. They were offering a 'buy one, get one half-price, which at £9.80 per monthly pack was attractive. I declined the offer of express delivery.

I have kept the old splint on all day and the foot has been reasonably comfortable through the afternoon, coping well with a quick walk to the local shop at around 5pm, hoping to buy a tub of their excellent creamy coleslaw to go with tonight's wings and wedges. Unfortunately they had sold out, and I didn't feel like trekking to the Co-op for some of theirs, which is not as nice.

## **Saturday 25 February 2017**

After a good lie-in this morning I had a really enjoyable shower. The vitamins arrived mid-morning without the benefit of express delivery. I ordered 100 plastic carrier-bags from an Amazon trader about the week ago because we really miss the supermarket bags which always gave us the means of wrapping food waste before putting it in the bin. Using freezer bags was getting expensive. The carriers also arrived today – 100 bags, lightweight but larger than what used to be the free bags given by shops, for the princely sum of £3.65 – 3½p per bag.

I had been wearing the old splint all day until the outside of the ankle started to feel both sore and itchy. I took it off, revealing a very red patch, and gave it a good basting with Savlon cream. The discomfort subsided and I discovered to my surprise that I was actually walking better without the splint than with it. The foot felt quite normal, and I was walking almost normally with no pain at all, which is a very unfamiliar experience. I have been wearing compression socks for the last couple of days, so maybe this is helping. I will leave the splint off, with the socks on, until I think I really need it – for Monday's walk, perhaps.

We have cooked mince and the substantial remains of my huge batch of mash, both from last Sunday's entertaining, so dinner will be cottage pie, mash and 'proper' mushy peas using Batchelors' Quick-Soak dried peas (the 'Bigga' ones, which they do stock, don't cut it at all) can't be found at either the Co-op or Sainsbury's, but Pat had found a packet in the cupboard a few days ago. I decided to try Amazon and found some good prices, so I ordered six packets for the store cupboard.

Pat had taken a present round to Sue and John's, so when it was getting a bit close to dinnertime I decided to cook the peas, which had been soaking since before she went out. When she got home, she put the cottage pie together and we had a delicious dinner. And the best news was that we had enough left for tomorrow.

Pat had made two syrup sponges for last Sunday, and something had gone wrong with the steaming. I had the bright idea of putting some water in the bowl, sealing it with clingfilm and microwaving it until really hot. This worked, and we have been enjoying the pudding with the remainder of my giant jug of custard for about three nights. Again, there should be just enough left for Sunday.

### **Sunday 26 February 2017**

I got up and dressed at 9am rather than going down to bring two cups of tea back. When I had finished my tea downstairs I put the splint on and walked over the road for the paper and a couple of other odds and ends.

The ankle was feeling better without the splint, so I took it off for the rest of the day. I hope to be able to do five walks of at least 30 minutes next week, which I did for the weeks beginning the 30 January and the 6 February.

I managed to get through *The Observer* on the Kindle by 3pm – a depressing read since most of it was about the Labour Party's catastrophic leader. I remember those smug, holier-than-thou, moral-high-ground-occupying old lefties from my CND days in the sixties, but I never thought I would see one leading the party. If Corbyn had a scap of integrity he would admit that his elevation to the leadership had been a terrible mistake on both his part and that of his head-in-the-clouds supporters and resign, so that the party could have a leadership election without the need for a challenge.

### **Monday 27 February 2017**

After a wet and rather windy night this morning was dry and calm. I got up just before 7:15 after waking up quite a lot for pees. My sleep is becoming seriously disrupted – enough to convince me that I need to start a log and check whether I am on the maximum dose of Tamsulosin, my prostate-softening pills. The leaflet is missing from the box so I had to look this up on the web. I am taking 0.4mg a day, and the Internet information says this can be doubled. When I started taking this drug it more-or-less halved the number of nocturnal loo visits, so doubling the dose might do that again – but I think I should consult the doctor rather than self-prescribe.

We carried on to the end of the football pitch and back before rejoining last week's route. This didn't take us quite up to the 30-minute target, but gave Bailey more time with his lead extended – more, in fact, than the old route on the lane at the bottom of

the village. We didn't meet any other dogs, so it was a peaceful walk. Our finishing time was a whisker over 27 minutes. There are various options for increasing the distance a little more.

I had put the old splint on, as the foot felt reasonably comfortable when we set off, but was moderately painful by the time we got home. It had actually been niggling while I was in bed with it in a position I thought should relax it completely. I took the splint off when I had settled down to write this.

By the time we had eaten breakfast and had a leisurely cup of tea, the foot had settled down and I decided to walk across to the shop for Anton's cigarettes and milk without the splint. Walking was no more painful than it had been with the splint and I was able to do the six-minute return trip without difficulty. This raises the question of whether the splint is actually helping at all.

By 1pm I had spent quite a lot of time sitting but had dealt with my mistake in boiling a stockpot full of chicken trimmings almost dry. Walking around the house opening and closing windows to get rid of the stink didn't cause me any real grief. The big question is whether or not I will dare to try tomorrow's walk without the splint.

## **Tuesday 28 February 2017**

The answer to that is 'no' – I didn't dare to walk without the splint. A couple of hours on from coming back I am still not sure whether this was a wise decision or not.

We did a repeat of yesterday's route, but I didn't get a final time because I hadn't restarted the stopwatch after Bailey's first poo. I logged it at 27 minutes, the same as yesterday.

The foot and leg felt uncomfortable, but only mildly painful, all the way round, and at 10am – having just changed the sheets and pillow-cases on our beds – if anything they felt worse. In fact, both legs felt stiff after the walk, and the soles of the feet felt bruised. They had more-or-less recovered by lunchtime, though, following a monster three-bag poo-patrol on our lawn and putting out the wheelie-bin when the dumps were safely dumped!

I spent a surprising lot of time search online for some new fitted sheets to fit our beds, which are 2ft6in divans with 8in deep mattresses. I was surprised how difficult this was – Amazon failed me for once – and relieved when I found some on Ebay. I ordered two, and if they are OK I'll order another two. What an exciting life I do lead.

Last night I had my last hot drink (tea) shortly after dinner, nothing else at all until bedtime and only a third of a glass of milk then. I took a pad and a pen up to the ensuite, leaving them on the window-sill with a neat little LED torch so that I could record my nocturnal pees. I clocked three at 12:07am, 1:31am and 6:35am. I have resurrected the *Excel* spreadsheet I used for this purpose before and after the doctor prescribed Tamsulosin in 2015 and started a new series of dates from today. This will enable me to check whether I actually am peeing more often at night than I was a few months ago.

In the afternoon I made a batch of Prue Leith's pancake batter. Dinner was jacket potatoes with baked beans, HP sauce and grated Cheddar, followed by slightly disappointing pancakes with a variety of sweet fillings.

Apparently today is the official last day of Winter, and Spring starts tomorrow. It is colder today than it has been for a week or more!

## **Wednesday 1 March 2017**

I woke quite early after loo-visits at 1:45 and 3:20, and was under no pressure from the bladder until 6:15, when I got up for a pee. 6:15 and yesterday's 6:35 are both in what I call my 'waking-up time', so I have only been wakened twice during the first

two nights of logging. The right foot was completely pain-free, as were all my other bits apart from the odd twinge in the right shoulder, regardless of what position it was in, so I was able to cat-nap, really enjoying the comfort of the down duvet in its wonderful John Lewis cover and my down pillows. I got up at 7:10 to see a clear, bright sky for the first day of Spring with no visible frost. However, the temperature was only 3 degrees.

The foot felt fine, but I decided to stick with the splint just for the walk, which I managed with very little discomfort. I also managed to restart the watch after both Bailey's toilet breaks so I got an accurate time for the walk of 26 minutes 44 seconds, just a quarter of a minute quicker than Monday but a lot less painful. I was glad to get the splint off when we got home.

My task for the morning was to tidy the desk in the study. The so-called IN-tray was piled high, so I spent getting on for an hour filing, shredding and binning

At 3pm, having done quite a bit of walking around the house, indoors and out, the foot felt really good – just a hint of pain, but my gait was quite normal.

### **Thursday 2 March 2017**

Another bright morning and another longish and very comfortable lie-in before I got up at 7:15. The loo log showed just two trips, at 2:05 and 4:40, so the reduced liquid intake is obviously working.

I forgot to change my watch before going out this morning but I did mentally note the time as 7:50 as we left. It was clear and mildish but without the deadly low sun that makes walking in and easterly direction so hard when we are coming home. We clocked more-or-less exactly 27 minutes, so the times have been very consistent through the week. I felt reasonably comfortable with the splint on, but was happy to remove it once we were home.

After breakfast, Pat and I decided to go to Retford to do a bit of shopping. I put the splint in the car boot but decided to try walking without it, and coped quite well. We were wandering around for a couple of hours, in and out of shops and on all sorts of surfaces, and the right foot was working well. Unless it is painful tomorrow morning I think I will try leaving the splint off for the early walk.

While Pat bought birthday cards, wrapping paper and other such essentials, and then had a good prowling round her favourite charity shop, I visited the fish stall. I bought a dressed Whiby crab, a very large fillet of natural smoked haddock to make two batches of Cullen Skink, two steaks from a superb-looking loin of tuna and a tail fillet of salmon to split between us. I walked into the charity shop to find Pat at the till – good timing or what?

After walking through the town to King's coffee house for flat whites and elevenses, we ambled back to the car, with my feet working really well.

I had been getting seriously concerned about the right foot over the past couple of weeks, so I am very relieved with its recent performance. It has done so well for such a long time, working well through the long period of recovery after the September 2015 surgery and for most of the time since, but just recently it has struggled. I hope that this has just been a glitch and I can avoid another long period of surgery and rehabilitation.

### **Friday 3 March 2017**

Today started with a still, grey morning. The temperature was around 5 degrees but it felt milder without yesterday's cold wind. Pat had left two birthday cards for me to post, so after considering various routes (we have four post boxes in the village) I decided to revisit the lane, scene of most of my walks over the last few years. The

post box is on an awkward corner with rush-hour traffic to contend with in both directions, so getting to the lane with a boisterous dog was difficult.

After yesterday's success I decided to try the walk without the splint. It wasn't 100% comfortable, and the steep downhill bit approaching the lane hurt quite a bit, but I don't think I would have been any better with the splint, and after getting home the foot felt quite good.

We walked along the lane until we had passed the 15-minute mark, which was nowhere near as far as I was used to going, and turned for home, arriving with 32 minutes 40 seconds on the watch. This gives a total walking time for the week of 2 hours 20 minutes, the best total for three weeks.

Things are in limbo at the moment because Alistair was taken to hospital yesterday with what looks like a very large stone in his one working kidney. He was still waiting to be called for surgery first thing this morning. Naturally Pat is very anxious so keeping very busy.

I 'undressed' the dressed crab I bought in Retford yesterday and mashed the meat up, and am defrosting two of my rolls for lunch. We haven't planned dinner because we have no idea what we might need to do to help Julie and the boys.

As it turned out there was nothing to do except wait for news – very testing for Pat. There was still none at bedtime.

### **Sunday 5 March 2017**

I have now logged loo visits for five nights and the totals range from two to four. This morning's was technically a three but the third time was 7:30, and if this had been a weekday I would already have been up by 7:15.

We had a lazy lie-in waiting for news from Alistair, which was good when it came: he will be discharge later today. They haven't removed the stone but have inserted a tube in the kidney to bypass the stone. This is a temporary measure, unless he manages to pass the stone himself.

I did a fairly big Co-op shop after breakfast. Shortly after that we had a call from Alistair to say they were coming over, which was a lovely surprise, first because it meant he must not be feeling too awful after his surgery and second because we would not have to cart all Julie's birthday bits and the dog across to Buxton.

We had a delightful afternoon and evening with them.

Before bed I made up a sponge mix for my next batch of bread.

### **Monday 6 March 2017**

I got up at 7am to allow time for developing my dough before the walk. It was a chilly but beautiful morning and I decided to extend the walk by going on past the football pitch until we hit the road and then retracing our steps back to the village hall and onto the street route home. We scored a time of 33 minutes 33 seconds exactly, the longest walk since the 10 February.

The right ankle was uncomfortable but not seriously painful by the time we got home.

By 10am, Pat had gone off to Anton's and the bread's knead-and-rest cycle was under way, allowing me to watch an episode of *Vikings* provided I didn't mind an interruption every ten minutes. At the end of the 60-minute rising, the dough had grown enormously and was amazingly easy to handle – slightly tacky but not sticking to anything, and leaving the worktop only needing a little wipe to removed any residue. The rolls were formed and in their oiled tins ready for proving and then the oven by 12:30., and by 2:30 the second batch were baking. The combination of Allinsons' Very Strong Bread Flour and their instant yeast, especially now I have kept

my ferment going since the 23 November last year, is performing amazingly. There is no brewer's yeast smell, but just a very subtle yogurty aroma. The rolls form a good crust and a wonderful crumb, open, soft and moist but elastic so I can poke it deeply with a finger and it bounces back completely.

The baking meant quite a lot of time on my feet, but the mysterious right foot was feeling quite comfortable by the end of the day.

## **Tuesday 7 March 2017**

It was another beautiful morning with a clear sky, bright sunshine and the temperature at about 4 degrees. The right foot felt fine when I got up, so I decided to try extending the walk a little more. We started on the current route but, after one bright and dry day I thought I would check the grass on the football pitch, The unworn parts were fine, so we did a full lap – with a brief and friendly encounter with Stanley before he decided he needed to get back to work. Then, instead of heading back to the road via the village hall we completed the reverse of the walk, clocking 36 minutes 21 seconds.

The foot coped well, and the idea of using the splint again seemed quite ridiculous.

After breakfast I changed the bottom sheets and pillowcases on our beds, having dropped my joggers, polo shirt, boxers and socks down to Pat for washing. Then I had a long lazy shower and a shave under the chin before taking the parcel containing Pat's posh all-titanium Citizen watch, which has rather lost itself after many years, down to the post office. We are hoping they will service it, but it is very tiny and she wants to try a man's watch, which more women are wearing again these days. Anton has lent her one of his for now, but she ordered one a couple of days ago which I think has solar charging and radio control, which gives it most of the features of my Casio.

I had a minor disaster at the tip. I took a builder's bag full of clippings and prunings, which was not too heavy to manage. I got it up on the edge of the green waste skip, and when turning it over to empty it, I somehow sropped it down the gap between the skip and the wall. Try as I might, with all the sticking-out stalks, I couldn't get it back up. There are two more bags of various vintages behind the shed at the end of the garden. I just hope at least one is usable...

The right leg stood up very well all day, which was gratifying after the longest walk of the latest round. Unfortunately my lower left molars didn't, and I was in quite a lot of paid after dinner.

## **Wednesday 8 March 2017**

The pain woke me at some point in the small hours – I was too miserable to bother checking the time. The whole of the inside of my mouth felt inflamed. I got up and rinsed with my Corsodyl alternative for quite a while and took two paracetamol. I must have got back to sleep earlier than I thought I would and only came to at around 6am. The tooth had calmed down a lot but was still painful, so it looks as though I'll need an emergency visit to the dentist.

The morning was mild at just under 10 degrees but with a fairly heavy cloud cover, which I quite welcomed as I have been finding walking due east into a bright, low sun rather taxing.

We did exactly the same route as yesterday. This was fortunate, because after the one loo stop I forgot to restart the watch. We had no other interruptions so it was fair to record about the same time as yesterday: 36 minutes 30 seconds.

The right foot wasn't quite as comfortable as yesterday, but I was able to keep up a decent pace.



After breakfast Pat and I finally got stuck into some gardening. One of the remaining builder's bags was in fairly good condition, and the other might be usable as well. I spent quite a while pulling off dead stems from our beautiful display of lucifers, and then tacked the horribly slimy mess on the paving behind it. This was where I had to work when wrestling the new fence panel into position, with a mixture of rotten leaves and fruit and who-knows-what-else stuck firmly to the slabs. I used the posh new lawn rake, a fork and a spade to gather the mess up and into the barrow, and wheeled it down to the composters.

I checked that the power feed to the bottom of the garden was working. It is fed from a fused spur on the kitchen ring main, which I had switched off for most of the winter because an earth leak somewhere (presumably down the garden) kept tripping the residual current device (we used to call them earth-leakage circuit breakers) that protects half the circuits in the house, including the kitchen and utility-room ones. I switched the spur on without mishap, assuming that I would have switched everything off in the shed and the summer-house, including the pond pump where I assumed the damp to be the cause of the problem. To my surprise, when I went back down the garden, the pump was pumping merrily. There is a pretty tatty bit of tape-insulating between various cables by the pond, so I will give that a good application of gaffer-tape for added protection.

While we were having coffee the window-cleaner arrived and the stupid dog went absolutely bananas. I had to stay in with him while Pat went back out to work, because he doesn't like dogs (he is a Jehovah's Witness, so there are probably many more strange traits than not being a dog-lover!).

Between us we got quite a lot done in the garden. The high spot for me was pressure-washing the decking bridge over the pond, which develops an incredibly slippery coating by the end of winter.

By the time we had had our 4 o'clock cups of tea, we were both pretty exhausted. We had filled another builder's bag, so that will be another assignment for me tomorrow. We both had leisurely showers and while I was having mine Pat went off to make her favourite pasta dish of linguine with fresh small tomatoes, mozzarella, basil and lots more sprinkled with grated pecorino romano. Unfortunately my lower right molars and the surrounding gums became very painful as soon as I started chewing this soft and tender fare, so my enjoyment was severely impaired. With the denture out and a wash with my not-quite-Corsodyl the pain eased.

### **Thursday 9 March 2017**

There was no repeat of the toothache I had in yesterday's small hours, so I slept well and woke to a beautiful spring morning with a clear blue sky and bright sunshine. The catch came when we went out: a near gale-force wind straight out of the west.

My feet both felt really good when I got up.

We did the same walk as yesterday. I managed not to lose control of the stopwatch on two poo stops, and we had a nice friendly encounter with Stanley on the football pitch. There was a slightly less pleasant one with a silly little fluffy creature which seemed to want to meet Bailey but started snarling and snapping as soon as they came together. Bailey more-or-less ignored it and it went away.

The sun is getting noticeably higher in the sky but is still low enough to make the eastbound stretch quite taxing. We finished the walk in 35 minutes 33 seconds. If we keep this up tomorrow we will get close to a 3-hour total for the week.

I managed to get my dental practice on the phone on Tuesday, after a bit of a struggle, and had an emergency appointment for 11:20 this morning with a warning that I might have a fairly long wait. So I decided to take the builder's bag of

'trimmings' from yesterday's gardening, plus the four new trunks which I had cut off the 'palm' tree, which had sprouted aggressively after being cut down almost the ground level a couple of years ago, to the tip early this morning. We also needed a few bits from Sainsbury's, which is only a couple of minutes' drive from the tip, so on an impulse I combined this with the trip to the tip. I had to ring Pat to ask what I needed to get on this unplanned visit, and in the end only forgot the porridge oats.

I had time to get changed and have some coffee before setting out to the dentist. The outcome was an x-ray and a prod about. The dentist didn't think the 'rather strange roots' of the two offending teeth would be amenable to an ordinary extractions, and might need 'surgical removals'. First, though, I needed a better x-ray, to be taken at the nearest dental hospital (Mexborough!). They booked the appointment and sent me off with a prescription for a course of penicillin (maybe that will cure my chestiness as well!).

Neither of us was feeling hungry, so we skipped lunch, making do with just a cup of tea and a Lotus Belgian caramel biscuit, our regular with coffee, which we used to buy as Speculoos in France but have now been renamed as Biscoff for some reason. Leaving a decent margin after 2pm, I walked over to the pharmacy for my penicillin. I was very aware of how well my right leg was performing: I really was walking quite normally!

Late in the afternoon we realised we had missed episode five of *The Good Karma Hospital* because we had Alistair's gang here on Sunday night and thanks to clashing programmed recordings it had not found its way onto our satellite box's hard drive, so we had our first encounter with the ITV Hub. I struggled with this for a few minutes before finding that the app's search engine was a bit primitive: once I had entered 'THE GO' it came up with the goods and we watched the programme before dinner. Some of the streaming apps are a bit crude, but they do take the pressure off the sat-box's limited recording capacity.

I took my first dose of penicillin at 2:30pm.

We finished the linguine left over from the other night, with a superb avocado (Sainsbury's!) each to start. My dodgy teeth coped perfectly.

## **Friday 10 March 2017**

Today started dull and grey, with the temperature at around 6 degrees.

I remembered my Friday weigh-in but rather wished I hadn't, with a weight of 13 stone  $8\frac{3}{4}$  pounds. This is two pounds lighter than a fortnight ago but two heavier than the week before that. It scores  $18\frac{1}{2}$  pounds in the weight-lost column against the all-time best of 30 pounds.

My foot was feeling really comfortable and continued to do so until most of the way through the walk, when things did begin to ache, but there was no sensation of weakness or stress. We did the same walk as we have done all week, but today we had quite a few dog encounter, all without growls and snarls. Bailey also subjected me to three poos. We finished in 36 minutes 45 seconds, giving a total for the week of 2 hours 58 minutes – just short of the three-hour mark. Lots of progress considering how I was struggling a few weeks ago!

While out, I noticed that quite a few new roadside boxes have been installed on strategic corners. I had heard that these were something to do with the telephone and broadband services, so I decided to run a broadband speed check on the PC. This returned a download speed of 71.33Mb/s and an up-load speed of 17.59Mb/s. This is pretty phenomenal speed, and explains how we can get UHD video streaming over the Internet from the likes of Amazon.

Pat said she intended to clean after breakfast, prior to doing some more gardening. I decided to hijack the vacuuming part before she drives herself to a total collapse. Using our heavier-than-it-looks Sebo, I vacced the kitchen first, with all the chairs on the table and everything else off the floor, and then mopped it with Dettol spray-and-mop, shutting Pat and the dog out until it dried. Then I did the whole downstairs: hall, front bedroom, bathroom, study, sittingroom and conservatory. The kitchen floor was dry by the time I had finished this lot, so I declared coffee time, after which I took the little rechargeable Vax dual-function (upright and handheld) cleaner upstairs to do battle with our sumptuous bedroom carpet. Finally I gave the Vax a thorough empty and clean, including the bits Pat didn't know existed like washing the foam filter in soapy water.

We had roasted chicken wings with Sainsbury's coleslaw (quite good) and potato salad (not so good because the potatoes were a little '*al dente*' for our taste). Later we started watching the latest episode of *The Team*, a complex and really multinational/multilingual thriller series. I'm not sure about Pat but I lost the plot when I dozed off, so we stopped the programme and saved it for tomorrow.

### **Saturday 11 March 2017**

My Saturday lie-in was frustrating. I had woken quite early, but couldn't either get back to sleep or really relax because I couldn't find a comfortable position for my right shoulder. I got up at 8:30 and took my time letting the dog out, making tea and doing my full ablution routine. Then I went back upstairs with two cups of tea and read for a while until Pat was ready to get up.

I used the combi microwave's oven facility to defrost and crisp a pack of Aldi's deluxe croissants. We were almost out of apricot jam so I had 2012-vintage apple jelly with mine

The fitted sheets I bought on Ebay should have been here by Thursday, but still hadn't arrived by the end of yesterday, so I didn't want to leave the doorbell unmonitored. Pat was determined to do more gardening, so I went up to the butcher in the next village and the Co-op on the way back for some essentials.

I persuaded Pat to stay indoors while I cut a branch off the plum tree to make room for installing the spare fence panel properly. This was awkward, as I was sawing upwards and above my own head, using my rather knackered right shoulder. I managed, though, but then found that quite a lot of ivy needed clearing. I did most of this and left a little to finish tomorrow, when Aidan comes to help out.

In spite of Pat's determination to get on with the garden, we decided to finish watching *The Team*. By then it was coffee time and Pat realised that she wanted to watch Rachel Khoo's *Little Parisian Kitchen*, which meant watching *The Two Greedy Italians* first. She got out eventually, leaving me to try tracking my delivery. The best I could do was to send a message to the vendor of my sheets via Ebay. Then I remembered that I had accidentally bought a subscription to *The Guardian* and *The Observer* last week instead of just the Sunday paper. I managed to cancel that, by which time the dog was undoing Pat's work as fast as she did it, so I brought him in and locked the back door.

Pat worked until about 3pm when we had tea and toasted teacakes, after which she was easily persuaded to relax and watch some TV.

Dinner was Barnsley chops with new potatoes, peas and mushrooms. The evening was Crufts followed by the first part of this week's helping of the Danish thriller *Follow the Money*. Neither of us felt we could maintain concentration for the second part starting at 10pm.

## **Sunday 12 March 2017**

We watched the second part of *Follow the Money* when we could take a break.

After getting the paper, Anton's fags and one or two other odd items, I needed to cut back the remaining ivy around where the fence panel demolished by Storm Doris came down, as Aidan was going to manage to pop in and help. This was a bit more complicated than I expected, and left me with a lot of cuttings to bag up, but I got it cleared in plenty of time. When Aidan arrived, we managed to get the new panel up to the tops of the concrete posts without too much difficulty. Getting it sliding in the slots was another matter, but it went in eventually.

While waiting for Aidan I decided to give the grass its first cut as it was looking pretty tufty. To my delight, our old Atco Admiral started perfectly after two presses on the priming bulb and two pulls of the starting cord. I set the cutting depth a little higher than at the end of last season and the grass looked a lot tidier when I finished.

## **Monday 13 March 2017**

On a beautiful Spring morning with bright sun and a temperature of about 6 or 7 degrees, Bailey and I did our first 40+-minute walk. We added a loop at the other end of the football pitch and clocked a total time of 42 minutes 6 seconds. My feet were beginning to feel a little painful at the halfway point, but not seriously so. I was definitely glad to arrive home, though, and by the time I had had a shower I felt fine.

I got the shower at the end of my bedmaking duty. It was the full routine: duvet-cover change as well as bottom sheets and pillow-cases. I took the opportunity of giving the quilt a good shake in all directions to redistribute the down filling, and repeated this once the cover was on the get the quilt right into the corners.

Pat went to Anton's, so I had a lazy morning with *Vikings*. It is not a patch on *Game of Thrones*, but is still a pretty good watch. I finished season two and watched the first two episodes of season three.

My stomach felt a bit dodgy all day. I took a Naproxen anti-inflammatory with dinner last night to calm the tooth down, but without the buffer of a morning dose of Omeprazole. I took another one tonight and felt unsettled again at bedtime.

## **Tuesday 14 March 2017**

I had a longish spell of weary restlessness before the amazing internal clock caused me to check the watch at exactly 7:15. My back was horribly stiff, presumably from Sunday's labours, and I even struggled to get my socks on. Once up, though, I loosened up and we did the same walk as yesterday in just over a minute less: 40 minutes 56 seconds. My feet – the right one particularly – was feeling the strain by the halfway mark and I was aware of walking more slowly towards the end. It was dull, with the temperature at about 9 degrees, but the sun managed to break through just as I was walking eastwards!

By midday the legs and feet, though a little weary, were more-or-less pain-free.

The late morning was taken up buying vet insurance for Bailey online.

## **Wednesday 15 March 2017**

Another very nice spring morning, with a fleece but no sweatshirt. This was the third walk on the newest route, and was very uneventful. My feet were feeling good, and we completed the route in 41 minutes 9 seconds bringing the week's total to well over 2 hours already. After breakfast we went to pick up a parcel of goods ordered by Pat and then to Sainsbury's with a list of just six items. Somehow we managed to spend a bit over £100 almost entirely on impulse buys. I was very pleased with the

way my legs and feet performed round the supermarket: they really seem to be almost back to what passes, for me, as normal.

### **Thursday 16 March 2017**

Pride comes before a fall. The right knee was quite painful going upstairs yesterday evening and hit back this morning. It was another lovely start to the day with a clear blue sky and bright sunshine, but I felt the knee was under stress almost as soon as we set off. Otherwise the walk was uneventful. I felt that I was walking slowly, but we still got round this week's route in 43 minutes – only a couple of minutes slower than yesterday.

I intended to finish demolishing the 'palm' today and then to take the third bag to the tip. The demolition turned out to be difficult, and all I managed was to cut off all the 'leaves', which were like sword blades. I had to lock Bailey in the house because his curiosity was in danger of getting his nose chopped off! The leaves and some ivy trimmings left over from the fence repair made the builder's bag rather heavy, but I managed to get it up the garden and into the car. I set off with this and a crate full of bottles and jars and had soon got rid of the rubbish.

The rest of the day was fairly lazy, even to the point of deciding to have just a light supper instead of a proper dinner. Beans on toast with an egg on top was Pat's suggestion. Using up the rest of the bacon from the local butcher was my addition.

### **Friday 17 March 2017**

This morning was chilly at 6 degrees with the wind blowing out of the west at around 17 mph and a dull, grey cloud cover.

My weight this morning was 13 stone 9½ pounds, three-quarters of a pound more than last week, but still 17¾ pounds lighter than when we started dieting at the beginning of March 2016.

My feet were feeling weary after the week's walks and my various tasks. The left foot (the one with the fused ankle) was painful along the top of the instep, and the right one (the one that has been giving me most trouble recently) just felt achy and battered. The result was a rather slow pace, but I managed to do the whole of this week's route. We met Stanley and his little housemate, now known to be called Louisa, and Bailey had a thoroughly amiable few minutes with them. Louisa was submissive (lying on her back) but seemed to trust Bailey. I had a hiccup with the stop-watch so the timing was not really reliable, but I knew I had been much slower than earlier in the week and settled for logging 45 minutes, giving a week's total of 3 hours 32 minutes. That is the eighth week without missing a single walk.

At around 10 o'clock I walked (slowly) across to the shops to pick up Pat's prescriptions and a bit of shopping. By the time I got back the pains in my feet had eased a little, but I still felt for the rest of the day as if the soles of my feet had been attacked with hammers. Obviously 3½ hours of concentrated, energetic walking through the week had left its mark.

### **Saturday 18 March 2017**

Pat beat me to getting up this morning and went down to make tea. I had really enjoyed my lie-in and was quite willing to go to Retford for the Farmers' Market, but she suggested instead that we go to Welbeck farm shop and garden centre, to which I added coffee and a nibble in the Harley café. This turned out to be a good decision, because once I was up and about my feet were still feeling pretty battered.

Amazingly, we spent over £75 on meat (including steaks, chops, sausages and burgers), cheese, patisserie and various other goodies in the farm shop! Luckily I have been feeling fairly optimistic about our cash position lately, so I wasn't worried.

We had coffee and a toasted tea-cake each, consumed at a leisurely pace, and then went into the main shopping centre where, among other things, we bought a replacement pot for our rooted Christmas tree.

The rest of the day was spent lazily, even to the extent of deciding to have a light tea rather than a cooked dinner – my home-made bread with the high-end cheeses we bought today and a jar of pâté, followed by the sweet delicacies we bought.

By tea-time my feet really were beginning to feel better. I just hope they will have recovered by Monday, when I am considering going back to my old walking route, which involves more time on pavements and less with Bailey on his long lead. If I increase the time, there is another football pitch which will give him longer to explore.

### **Monday 20 March 2017**

Sunday was pretty routine, capped by beautiful rib-eye steaks from Welbeck, served with jacket potatoes and the left-over Stroganoff sauce from last week filled out with fried onions and mushrooms – very nice. Bonne Maman crème brûlée to follow.

Today's plans were totally chaotic, so I decided to get up half an hour early for the walk. As planned, we did the old 40-minute lane route, in a more-or-less painless 43 minutes 15 seconds. The temperature was around 11 degrees, but with a very dull sky and light rain. There were no major puddles on the lane and most of the mud had been washed away leaving just gritty deposits.

Pat had volunteered us to collect Alistair from Stepping Hill Hospital, fortunately on the southern fringe of Stockport. He was being assessed for all sorts of things, and today he was scheduled for endoscopy from both ends. We left home just after 9:30 and spent a couple of hours with Julie, waiting for a call from Al. This came something after 2:15, so we set off up the A6, which was surprisingly quiet even when we were approaching Stockport. The traffic through Hazel Grove, where the hospital is located, was pretty bad, but we got Al out and home in reasonable time. Pat went on the school run with Julie so she got some quality time with the boys. By the time we got home Bailey had been alone for around 9 hours, but didn't seem any the worse for the long lonely day.

We snacked on a pizza, some cheese and yogurt, and had an early night.

### **Tuesday 21 March 2017**

Monday's taxing schedule gave me a restful night, with one pee early on and then nothing until 6am. It was a beautiful morning, with the temperature at about 5 degrees and a brisk wind. My right ankle was moderately painful, so I was a little slower than yesterday. I must have goofed with the stop-watch (yet again!) so I had to estimate the walking time at 45 minutes.

Most of the morning was taken up with a haircut and beard trim, followed by a one-bag visit to each of Sainsbury's and Aldi. After this both legs were feeling sore and weary; I don't know why. I just hope they are back to normal for tomorrow's walk.

They certainly weren't when I was taking the wheelie-bin out at around 5pm!

### **Wednesday 22 March 2017**

At 7:15am, when I got up, the morning was very dull, with the temperature at around 5 degrees. I did a round of neck exercises before I went to the bathroom, as a gesture of good intent. I have been very stiff lately, so I need to get back into a routine of neck, shoulder, back and leg exercises.

We did the lane walk with no real incidents and no stopwatch errors in exactly 44 minutes. My right foot was moderately painful – nothing I couldn't deal with but it definitely slowed me down: I used to do this walk in almost exactly 40 minutes every

morning. By lunchtime the feet were not feeling too bad, benefiting from the rest they got while I was trying to find all the Bernard Cornwell novels that make up *The Last Kingdom* series on my Kindle and email them to Alistair. I managed this eventually and then started trying to get the first series of *The Last Kingdom* onto a USB drive from the Humax FreeSat box. Unfortunately the box doesn't seem able to deal with a USB stick when it already has an external hard drive connected.

By dinner time the right foot was feeling fairly comfortable. I was fine setting up the kitchen for our dinner – tagliatelle with sun-dried tomato pesto and plenty of cheese to sprinkle.

### **Thursday 23 March 2017**

This morning was dull and dry, but wet underfoot. The puddles on the lane were quite big but there was plenty of clear asphalt. I had forgotten to do my right-ankle exercises before getting up, and the ankle was very stiff. It slowed me down, but wasn't very painful. The result was a time of 46 minutes for the walk, so with a day in hand the week's total is only a couple of minutes short of three hours.

I did a bit of pruning in the garden after breakfast and my legs were really painful, as they were in Aldi on Tuesday, particularly when I had to kneel on the floor to get a half-case of my Spanish red wine out of the shelves. I found it almost impossible to stand up, and it feels like that again today.

The rest of the day was fairly lazy.

### **Friday 24 March 2017**

I got up at 7:10 this morning to a bright but cold (5 degrees) morning. The feet were still feeling rather battered, but I was walking around quite freely. I did a full set of neck and shoulder mobilising exercises. I weighed in at half a pound heavier than last week: 13 stone 10 pounds, less than recent highs but still disappointing.

Bailey and I did the fifth lane walk of the week without any difficult moments. The right ankle was only mildly painful but slowed me down, so the finishing time was 45 minutes 39 seconds. This made the week's average time 44 minutes 47 seconds and the total 3 hours 44 minutes, both slower than last week. I am spending longer walking each week, which is good news, but am not increasing the distance, which is not!

Both legs and feet felt pretty grim for most of the morning, but after lunch I felt able to tackle the task of unpotting and repotting our rooted Christmas tree to give it more root space. Once that was done I started the mighty Atco Admiral mower, which I had left warming in the sun since mid-morning, and cut the grass, which has really started growing now, on a lower setting than last time.

Dinner tonight was wings, wedges and an Aldi own-brand nearly-a-Magnum choc-ice.

### **Monday 27 March 2017**

The weekend was dominated by anxiety over Alistair. He called an ambulance for himself when he was having very severe pain, presumably from his large kidney stone. So we had a low-key Mother's Day. The plan for today is to go to Stockport to visit him after doing the usual trip to Anton's, where I am needed to replace the battery in his smoke alarm.

I was wide awake at 5am (4am GMT) and tried very hard – maybe too hard – to get back to sleep. I must have done so eventually because when I checked the time at exactly 7:15 I was dizzy and shaking with the shock of sudden awakening.

We did the football-pitch walk without problems in 41½ minutes, but afterwards I felt rather strange – a little dizzy and shaky. I recovered in time for us to go to Anton's

and then drive across the Peak to Chapel-en-le-Frith to pick up the A6 for the usual battle through the Stockport suburbs.

Alistair was in a lot of pain, but managed to stay remarkably cheerful. The doctors think his 7mm kidney stone may be on the move, and are keeping him going on a horrific cocktail of pain-killers, up to and including oral morphine.

On the way home, we called in for a coffee with Julie and the boys before setting out to rescue the poor neglected dog. As usual he was insanely delighted to see us and hadn't disgraced himself in any way.

We cobbled together a fry-up of bacon, sausages and tomatoes for yet another lazy supper.

## **Tuesday 28 March 2017**

I was very reluctant indeed to get up this morning, after our hectic day yesterday, but discipline prevailed and I came down at my usual time of 7:15.

I have become increasingly concerned by my many aches and pains over the past few weeks. The joint at the outer end of my right collarbone is permanently painful, tending to weaken my right arm and sending referred pain all round the shoulder. It suddenly occurred to me this morning that I have not taken any of my prescribed Naproxen anti-inflammatories for quite a while. I volunteered, and the doctor agreed, to cut them from two to one a day, but I decided to try taking one morning and evening for a few days, starting this morning. I have also started doing my neck, shoulder and back exercises, doing the first full programme this morning. It is time I stopped just taking pain for granted and putting up with it.

We did the football-pitch walk again. My legs were tired (along with the rest of me) and my right ankle was moderately painful, but we got round in 43 minutes 44 seconds.

During breakfast we heard from Julie that the hospital want to sent Alistair home. We all agree that this is crazy, so Pat tried to contact the hospital and get a message to Al's consultant, based on me googling like crazy to find the right contact details. Events moved swiftly, though, and by lunchtime Julie had arranged to collect him from Stepping Hill (of the Charles Dickens Memorial Hospital, as I named it when I saw the ancient. That was a great relief for us, having done the return trip yesterday, but also because it meant Julie was accepting the situation.

At lunchtime I discovered that only six of the rolls from my last bread bake were left, so at 1pm I got the ferment out of the fridge, where it had been sitting since the 4 March (23 days ago) and fed it with 150 grams each of flour and water, ready for another batch. The plan was to start the sponge if the starter was active enough by bedtime. By 3pm the first few bubbles were showing, and by bedtime the ferment was looking very frothy. My plan went awry when I realised that we are due to go to the 'silver screening' at the local cinema tomorrow, so I will have to put off the bake until Thursday. I put the ferment in the fridge to slow things down.

## **Wednesday 29 March 2017**

Another morning when I would have given anything to have an extra hour or two in bed, because I was really comfortable. This, combined with how my bones felt when I got up, and even more during the walk, convinced me that going back on the Naproxen has been a very good idea. Bailey and I did the football-pitch route in 40 minutes 47 seconds, the fastest since we went back on the '40-minute routes' 2½ weeks ago. The previous fastest was 40 minutes 56 seconds on Tuesday of the first week and the slowest 46 seconds.



It was a grey morning with a little light rain coming down as we set out but this soon stopped. We had an uneventful walk with my feet and legs feeling better than they have for ages. My troublesome shoulders and lower back also felt really good. I think I will do a full week on two Naproxens a day and then cut back to one. I went for several years never being sure if my NSAIDs were doing any good but taking them anyway. Now I know they were!

Just after 10:30 we drove into town to see the oldies' showing of *Viceroy's House*,. I had to park quite a way from the cinema so Pat went in to get the tickets while I stashed the car. It was uphill all the way back to the Savoy, and I was amazed how fast and freely and painlessly I was striding – hooray for Naproxen! The film was really excellent – a real eye-opener about Indian independence and its consequences.

I didn't have time for exercises before we went out so I did a full set of repeats after we had had a cuppa and a bite to eat. Nothing hurt much and I definitely felt better immediately after the routine.

### **Thursday 29 March 2017**

I got up at 7:10 on a mild but dull morning. The outside of my right ankle (the 'catastrophically failed' one) was a little painful but this still eased. We had a good walk, with Bailey pulling me along and me managing to keep up a brisk pace. We had a lovely encounter with little Louisa, Stanley's 17-week-old housemate, who galloped across the football field to greet Bailey, and met up amicably with a couple of other dogs. I didn't stop the watch for these delays, but we still got round in 43 minute 17 seconds, which made this a pretty fast walk.

After breakfast I got stuck into my breadmaking, still feeling quite good spending time on my feet. I followed the same recipe as last time, when the dough was miraculously easy to handle without sticking to anything. At least, I thought I did. I couldn't understand why the dough was so much softer and stickier than last time, making the shaped portions look more like rock cakes than rolls, until I checked my notes carefully and realised that I had missed out the final addition of 150 grams of flour! In spite of this, the portions rose to fill the three baking sheets – maybe even bigger than last time's – and I got the first tray in the oven at 2:15pm. I turned the tray after 25 minutes and gave it five more for a nice even medium brown crust. The rolls had grown sideways but not as high as the last batch, probably because the wetter dough was much softer. Then the other two went in together. They all came out rather flat and paler than the first, but quite crusty.

After our afternoon cuppa, I remembered to do a thorough routine of neck, shoulder and back exercises.

### **Friday 31 March 2017**

This morning was dull and grey but dry (apart from the odd spot of rain while we were walking) and very mild at around 12 degrees. The outside of my right ankle was quite sore when I got up and became a little more painful during the walk, but I managed a good brisk pace all the way. We met more dogs this morning than ever before, I think, but without any hostility at all. Little Louisa ran half way across the field to greet Bailey when she saw him. I must have forgotten to restart the watch after one of the poo stops, so I have estimated the walking time at 43 minutes, giving a total for the week of 3 hours 32 minutes and a daily average of 42½ minutes. I am walking far more fluently now and keeping up enough speed to get me breathing quite deeply and to work up a good sweat.

## Monday 3 April 2017

After a pretty uneventful weekend (thank goodness!) and a good night's sleep (I was only woken for a pee once, at 5:30am, when I was amazed to hear a blackbird singing in the dark). I got up just before 7:15 to see thick mist out of the window, but by the time we were ready for our walk it had nearly cleared to leave a bright, sunny morning – a bit too sunny as we were walking straight into it for the first half of the old lane route. It was a comfortable 5 degrees. I considered staying with the football-pitch route but fancied a change.

My ankles were feeling quite good, with only mild twinges, and were still going well when we got home in 42 minutes 26 seconds (no stopwatch goofs!). I had a good sweat on and was breathing quite hard at the finish. I think the Naproxen is working really well.

Pat was at Anton's for the morning so I grabbed the chance to watch a couple more episodes of *Vikings* on Amazon. Later, going through the morass of junk emails, I found that my daughter Sarah had shared news of Aldi's London Gin at under a tenner a bottle having had excellent reactions. When Pat got back reporting that the car only had 45 miles of diesel left, I decided to do the bit of shopping that I had planned for early in the week this afternoon: fill up at Sainsbury's then visit the supermarket and finish at Aldi. They had plenty of the gin so I grabbed a bottle, and I couldn't resist opening the bottle for a taste when I got home. It tasted pretty good, and great for the price.

I had another trip out before dinner, because I had taken a container of butter chicken curry out of the freezer but we didn't have any naans or poppadums, so I took a quick drive up to the Co-op. I bought Patak's naans, which were rather unimpressive.

Before dinner I had to deploy the garden hose for the first time this year. All our pots and containers were very dry and the BBC weather app forecasts no rain at all for the next couple of weeks. Whatever happened to April showers.

## Tuesday 4 April 2017

This morning I felt that I had had rather a restless night, and was quite surprised to see that I had only logged three pees. I did right-ankle and right-knee exercises at 7:10 and was downstairs a little earlier than usual. The morning was sunny and mild at 10 degrees.

I decided to go back to the football-pitch route as the sun would be a problem on the lane walk. We had two poo-stops *without* stopwatch errors, a brief and amiable encounter with Basil the Basset and two meetings with Lovely Louisa, who was desperate to play with Bailey. He wasn't really bothered, though, so the meetings were quite brief. We got round in by far the fastest time of 40 minutes and three seconds. My legs did well, though the right ankle and knee were beginning to protest by the time we got home. I was breathing quite hard and sweating heavily at the end, so a useful walk from the exercise point-of-view.

My walking really has improved. After the recent relapse, the right foot was automatically putting itself down flat with every step, rather than heel-first like the left one. Mind you, the left has the advantage of a fused ankle joint. Anyway, I am now walking much more naturally on the right foot.

I forgot to do my exercises yesterday, so I really needed to do a good session after breakfast. I did this, with the 'assistance' of the dog, and then went for a slightly overdue shower and shave – overdue because we had decided not to change our bedding yesterday because it had been changed less than a week ago. I normally have a shower after I have sweated and strained with the fitted sheets on our heavy Tempur mattresses and the cover on our king-size duvet.

After a bright start, the weather had turned very dull, still and grey, so neither of us felt very inclined to do anything apart from drinking coffee. In spite of the forecast, there was a very light drizzle for a few minutes, but it dried in minutes. Spring – pah!

We each ate one of my new rolls for lunch. They are a bit strange: much shallower than usual (which means they will fit in the toaster) with quite a crisp crust and a very open crumb consisting mostly of large holes! They eat quite well, in spite of the missing 150 grams of flour. The other day I bought two fresh bags of Allinsons Very Strong bread flour, ready for the next – correct! – bake.

Dinner was sausages and mash with Yorkshire pudding, gravy, fried onions and baked beans, leaving no room for pudding. Frankly, I found it rather overwhelming: we are both losing our appetites and our foodie enthusiasms.

### **Wednesday 5 April 2017**

I was up at 7:10 again and we were out for our walk at 7:40. I have decided to do the lane walk only when I will not be walking into bright sunshine, and today was just right, with a hazy sun partly shaded by a black cloud. Everything was working well and I reached the first field gate, which was my old 15-minute target, about half a minute outside that and the second – the old 20-minute target – in 20 minutes and a few seconds. Motivated by this success I walked as fast as I could comfortably and stopped the watch at our gate. It showed *exactly* 40 minutes! After all sorts of tribulations, this is me back to my old performance. The right foot was very mildly painful when we got home but this faded quite quickly and the feet felt fine for the rest of the morning.

My spreadsheet shows that, after post-surgical obstacles, I got back to the 40-minute target exactly a year ago, after re-starting my walking with 10 minutes a day in late January 2016. Then my recent troubles put a stop to that. This week is the fourth with every day reaching or exceeding 40 minutes, I remember now that, when I was getting to the second gate in less than 20 minutes I would carry on across the field and turn at exactly 20. At my best I was getting up to halfway across the field before turning. I will try to get back to that.

This afternoon I had an appointment with the ophthalmologist at Bassetlaw Hospital. This diary has been mostly about my bones, but my vision is deteriorating. I have early cataracts and posterior vitreous detachment (the jelly-like vitreous humour isn't sticking to the retinas) which produces bit of debris that float around in the vitreous. These floaters have been with me for many years but are causing me much more trouble lately. I have to keep flicking my glance upwards or jerking my head upwards and/or sideways to throw them out of the way. This suggests that the vitreous is now a lot less jelly-like than it used to be and is liquid enough to allow the floaters to move. At previous appointments they have seemed more concerned about the cataracts, but but I am only getting mild blurring and flaring when looking at bright lights, nowhere near enough to affect my vision. The floaters are much more of a problem, and are much worse than they were at my last appointment a year ago. It was a long job as I had to have several tests and then have the dilation drops in, after which I had to wait 20 minutes for them to take effect. I saw the junior doctor of the two and didn't feel he was taking me seriously enough, dismissing the floaters as normal and not mentioning cataracts at all. I have to go again in six months – maybe I will get the consultant then.

### **Thursday 6 April 2017**

It was gorgeous this morning, with the temperature at only 5 degrees but brilliant sunshine. I didn't bother with a sweatshirt under the fleece and was more than warm enough, working up a good sweat fairly quickly. Because of the sun I opted for the football-pitch route, but I don't think the lane route would have been any worse. My

right leg didn't feel quite as good as yesterday, but I kept up a good pace. The walk was totally uneventful, with no other dogs and no stopwatch errors, and I was amazed that we got back in 38 minutes 46 seconds.

We went to Doncaster this morning, to a carpet shop that was supposed to stock a type of stain-resistant carpet called SmartStrand, but had apparently not been visited by a representative for a long time. So we had a wasted journey – or would have done if we hadn't combined the trip with a visit to our favourite butcher.

We skipped lunch as we were both feeling rather headachey and muzzy, but had a rather late teacake with a cup of tea. Later, I actually managed to remember to do my exercises. I think I ought to get back into the groove of doing them early in the morning, either before the walk or after breakfast. The bones are feeling quite good, though, in spite of missing a few work-outs.

On the subject of lapses of memory, I forgot to do the watering last night so this had to be done as a matter of urgency this evening.

### **Friday 7 April 2017**

It was dull this morning so the choice of route for the walk was not influenced by the weather. The temperature was about 5 to 6 degrees but it didn't feel cold when we went out. Having said that, I had to retrieve my fleece from the car and that definitely felt cold. We did the lane route with a couple of friendly dog encounters and I stopped the watch at 40 minutes 45 seconds, giving an average walk time of 40 minutes 24 seconds and a total for the week of three hours 22 minutes. That is the lowest weekly total of the four since we went back to the nominal 40-minute routes, if only by a very small margin.

I did very little through the morning, apart from yet another attempt to make sense of SmartSense: the sensible solution seemed to be to forget it and opt for a really high-quality polypropylene carpet, so I phoned the shop we visited in Doncaster yesterday and arranged for them to visit next Wednesday.

I made yet another quick visit to the Co-op and then we had soup for lunch – Pat's home-made creamy carrot and coriander – not something out of a tin.

After a quick trip to the Co-op for milk and a few other essentials, with a stop-off at the OneStop for their coleslaw, which is better than the Co-op's, I cooked the usual Friday night dinner: a box of Sainsbury's fresh chicken wings out of the freezer and potato wedges, to be followed by Aldi's choc-ice lollies.

### **Saturday 8 April 2017**

I decided to check how long I have been taking two Naproxen a day this morning, using the search-and-replace function on this diary. It seems that I re-started the two a day on or around Tuesday 28 March, which is nearly two weeks ago. I think the sensible plan will be to cut back to one a day from next Tuesday, the 11 April.

The next thing I wanted to check was where I got my Seville oranges, and to see if they have good organic lemons. I want to make some lemon curd, because the £4 jar I bought recently was really disappointing. If I buy a big bag of lemons, as I did with the oranges, I can stash the surplus in the freezer and take one or two out as required.

I had an agonising hour on my knees, clearing the strip drain that runs right across the front of the house. I was in quite a lot of pain through the evening and decided to do my exercise routine just before bed.

## **Sunday 9 April 2017**

Today's physical stress was rather gentler: On a beautifully summery day I decided to bring our heavy six-seater genuine teak table and chairs out of their winter shelter and onto the terrace. Apart from that, the only real work on this Sunday, when the temperature in our garden reached an amazing 25 degrees, was cooking a roast chicken dinner with roasties and three vegetables.

## **Monday 10 April 2017**

I had a restless night, struggling to get back to sleep and stay asleep after the night's one and only pee at around 4am, and I really didn't want to get up. I forced myself at 7:10, though, and we had a lovely walk in bright sunshine and a temperature of 10 degrees. All doggy encounters were amicable, and we finished the lane route in 40 minutes 11 seconds.

As usual, Pat went to see Anton this morning, so I grabbed the opportunity to watch a couple of episodes of *Vikings* on Amazon.

My guts were feeling quite dodgy through the morning, so I cancelled my 3:20pm - appointment for dental stuff at the hospital in Mexborough – you don't want to lose bowel control in the dentist's chair!

We had leftover chicken, roast potatoes, cabbage and carrots for dinner, and my stomach felt fine.

## **Tuesday 11 April 2017**

It didn't feel as good this morning when I woke up rather suddenly out of a vivid dream at exactly 7:10. My trip to the loo was fairly uneventful but I felt that there might be more to come!

It was another pleasant morning, though with the temperature nearer 5 than 10 degrees. In spite of this I managed without a sweatshirt under the fleece. I had Easter cards to post so we went for the lane walk, but with a variation: I turned back at the 15-minute mark and we did a lap-and-a-bit of the football field at the road end of the lane. The field was deserted and Bailey had a good poke around without interruption.

The 'bit' bit ate up enough time to allow the walk to finish in 40 minutes 27 seconds, with my guts still feeling wobbly but manageable.

Pat has been going crazy with her mobile phone. Aidan has said she can have an old iPhone of his (which has made me think about moving to Apple as well, in spite of my basic dislike of the company!), but in the meantime I am trying to find out why her email is in such a tangle. Some of the phone's messages say she is short of storage, so I have been moving any apps that allow it from main memory to the SD card. We will see... Mobiles are a total pain, but could we exist without them?!!!

I bit the bullet after lunch and did an upgrade from my Samsung to an iPhone 7 256GB, which should be here on Thursday.

Before dinner I watered all the containers again, without the help of Bailey who nearly drowned the other day because he insists on attacking the jet from the hose. Dinner was a quick butter chicken curry, courtesy of leftovers from Sunday, Pataks and Uncle Ben.

I didn't take any Naproxen, as I want to reduce the dose and had already taken one at breakfast time.

## Wednesday 12 April 2017

When I woke up I was worried about Bailey, because he had been rather strange yesterday evening, going off to bed in the study in the middle of the evening and eager to go back when he had had his bedtime visit to the garden, which was abnormally brief.

I was therefore very relieved to hear him shaking himself when I got up for the last of four trips to the loo at 6:30. He tends to do this when he hears me on the move – maybe a message to tell me he is up and about in the hope that I won't go back to bed! Following this I felt able to go back and really relax for 45 minutes.

It was a dull, grey morning, dry and mild at 9 degrees, but when we went out of the gate there was a lively westerly wind blowing. I could feel the lack of pain control, mainly in the right ankle, though the discomfort was only mild.

I don't know if it was worrying about the dog, or maybe the trauma of making the switch to an iPhone in spite of my profound dislike of Apple as a company, but I was thoroughly disorganised this morning. First, I forgot to change watches and only realised this when I had already opened the front door. Then, a couple of hundred yards from home I realised that I hadn't got Bailey's amazing anti-pull harness on properly: it is always a wrestle to get both his front feet through the straps in spite of his eagerness to get walking, and I had obviously missed one! I didn't want to try sorting this out without a seat, as my old bones make getting up from a kneeling position really difficult, so I switched the lead from the harness to his collar and he walked well until we got to the football pitch, where there is a seat. I forgot to stop the watch for this stop, and we had quite a long encounter with Stanley and Louisa, so I had to make an adjustment to the measured time. My best estimate was 40 minutes 50 seconds, and both feet were feeling more battered than they have recently by the time we got home.

I checked the dosage guidelines for Naproxen and decided to try taking half a 500mg tablet twice a day rather than 500 just once.

I had emails from Tesco Mobile telling me that my new phone would be delivered between 11:16 and 12:16 – time to play before the carpet guys arrive at about 1pm to show us their samples, measure up and presumably give us a price. I had a look at the iPhone 7 256GB on Amazon and I could get one tomorrow on Prime at well over £900.

## Saturday 15 April 2017

I seem to have lost my thread with the diary since Wednesday.

The phone arrived without a SIM card for my number but with a pay-and-go one which I didn't want. It seemed that I was meant to use my old SIM, but the new Apple needs a *nano* card rather than the mini in my Samsung. There followed a frantic exchange of emails with Tesco Mobile's support team which ended with a promise of the new card being delivered in three days. So – today, maybe? No – nothing by the end of the day.

Meanwhile, the trouble was that the iPhone wouldn't let me get past the first couple of stages of set-up without a SIM. It looks as if the card won't arrive until Tuesday at least.

## Monday 17 April 2017

As far as the bones – the main target of this diary – are concerned, the weekend was uneventful. I had been getting negative messages from the shoulders because I had been too busy – or lazy – over the Easter weekend to do the exercise routine. I fitted

a couple in on Sunday and things feel much better this morning. The ankles have behaved really well.

I seem to have lost the ability to enjoy a weekend lie-in lately. There always seems to be something to worry about in my not-quite-conscious state. So, having got up fairly early yesterday, I decided to do the same today and treat this as an ordinary Monday. Bailey and I did the football-pitch route, and because of a concentration of yappy little dogs on the path along the pitch I took Bailey round three sides on the grass. I decided to do the same on the way back, and we still finished the walk in 40 minutes 40 seconds – not bad for a standard route with two short sides of the field added. My feet were hardly painful at all, during or after the walk.

I stayed feeling in good fettle all day. 500Mg of Naproxen with breakfast and 250 with dinner seems to be working fairly well, with the exercise programme (which I did late this afternoon, with the dog's assistance) definitely doing a lot of good.

## **Tuesday 18 April 2017**

Perhaps because the pain-control is working better I was more relaxed in bed this morning, and I could easily have stayed in bed for quite a while. However, discipline prevailed and I got up at 7:10 precisely. It was a beautiful, sunny morning but the temperature was only about 2 degrees – with a sharp breeze. We repeated yesterday's walk, with the extra loop round the field, but I had to estimate the time because, after three normaly loo breaks, Bailey decided to mess me about on the fourth and I forgot to restart the watch for about four minutes. I therefore decided arbitrarily to record the same time – 40 minutes 40 seconds – as yesterday.

My feet felt a little less comfortable when we started and quite a bit more by the time we got back, but nothing really to worry about.

I had no difficulty mowing the grass during the afternoon, nor going across the road twice to deal with the neighbours' chickens while they are away.

I remembered to do my exercises just before bed.

Pat had a worrying dip in her blood sugar at bedtime. It made her feel nauseous and very eager to lie down.

## **Wednesday 19 April 2017**

Today's was another gorgeous sunny morning, with the temperature at around five degrees. I was very comfortable lying awake, on and off, for an hour or so before getting up at my usual time of 7:10.

We repeated yesterday's route which, with a couple of pleasant doggy encounters and one with a delightful little girl (pre-school age, I think) on her way to school with her mother and bigger brother, took 41 minutes 31 seconds. The little girl's brother was cautious, but she made friends with Bailey in seconds and kept looking back to wave at him after they had overtaken us.

Oh yes – the legs. I almost forgot! They were more comfortable than yesterday, but still a little painful. Nothing to hinder me, though.

I ended up wishing I hadn't put a sweater on, because I felt really hot by the time we got home.

The SIM card arrived this morning so I spent most of the day wrestling with the iPhone, and in some areas being quite unimpressed, though the speed and display quality were real eye-openers. Having had no trouble dealing with emails on the Android phones I was amazed that the Apple product didn't seem to offer the same ease of setting up. I was reduced to using my provider's webmail system – the one Pat uses on the PC. By the end of the day I was very frustrated. Aidan had said I

would find the Apple system much more intuitive than the Samsung one I was used to, but so far I had found the exact opposite.

Alistair finally had his scheduled kidney operation in the afternoon and phoned us, sounding very groggy from his general anaesthetic and morphine for the pain. If he gets out tomorrow we will be driving over to Stockport to take him home.

### **Thursday 20 April 2017**

I was awake early and very comfortable, but I couldn't stop worrying about the blasted iPhone. In the end I got up just five minutes early at 7:05. It was a dull, grey morning but warmer at 9 degrees. We did the full augmented football-pitch route without timing errors and with only one friendly encounter with the long-haired dachshund and finished in 40 minutes 54 seconds. There were a few moments of light drizzle but I was very warm and sweaty when we got home, even though I hadn't put a sweater on under the fleece.

I spent most of the day wrestling with the iPhone, mainly trying to get my email working. Whatever I tried, and double- or triple-checked, I could not get the 1&1 POP server to respond and send my incoming mail. Either I have made a silly mistake, or there is something wrong with the way the phone tries to connect. Back to Google tomorrow...

### **Friday 21 April 2017**

The morning was dull, dry and still at 9 degrees. My weight was exactly the same as last week at 13 stone 12¼ pounds.

My legs and feet felt good when I got up and not much worse when we had finished the new variation of the football-pitch route in 39 minutes 48 seconds, giving an average for the five days of 40 minutes 43 seconds and a total walking time of 3 hours 23 minutes – within five seconds of the times for the two previous weeks.

The morning was devoted to email on the iPhone. I ended up talking to a nearly-inaudible young North American at 1&1 Internet, who supply my website hosting and email services, and after half an hour or so I finally had incoming mail, which – over the next couple of hours – I more-or-less learned to manage.

So I will be keeping the iPhone 7. The camera is tons better than the one on my Samsung Galaxy 3 and everything seems to run about ten times a fast. The display quality is a delight, too. I even got to test it for incoming calls in the Co-op car park – Pat ringing to tell me I had left my wallet on the kitchen table! It is a fraction bigger than the Galaxy and just twenty grams heavier with its all-metal construction. I just found the huge selection of ringtones and chose classic – a fairly fierce phone bell sound. Now I need to find out how to manage my contacts...

I figured that out, roughly, and then switched to clearing the decks for the carpet layers who will be here to do almost the whole downstairs on Wednesday. I made a fair dent in the office, but the is still a load to do.

We had good news in the afternoon: Julie had been able to pick Alistair up from hospital and he had had his surgery to remove the 7mm stone in his kidney. We decided we would go over tomorrow.

I stopped at 5:20pm ready to do my usual wings and wedges.

### **Saturday 22 April 2017**

I managed to stay comfortable and without undue anxiety until after 8am, having finally got my iPhone handling email – a massive relief! I went down in my dressing gown, which tells Bailey that I am going to take tea back up to bed, so he was rather



sulky. I had a shower and shave and he was even more sulky when I got downstairs in my 'smart' outfit (not joggers, polo shirt and second-best trainers).

We left for Buxton at 10:10am and got to the edge of town in an hour and twenty minutes. Al was still uncomfortable but vastly better than the last time we saw him. We decided to leave when he took his boys for haircuts so that I could get my teeth into clearing the study/bedroom for the carpetlayers. They won't be here until Wednesday, but the study is a nightmare, so I was very relieved when, by 5pm, I had got all the really difficult stuff moved into the front bedroom (which is not getting new carpet) Only the bed and the desk were left – the former for Bailey and the latter to keep me online).

### **Sunday 23 April 2017**

I was able to relax totally in bed until shortly before 8 this morning, when I got up, made tea and walked across to the precinct for the Sunday paper. I took Pat a cuppa at about 8:45.

Later on I got stuck back in, moving all the crockery and glassware out of the sideboard in the sittingroom and then shifting various other bits and pieces which I stashed on or under the big old table in the conservatory. Things are looking a bit tight for getting everything out of the way in all the spaces where carpet is being laid. If the guys are only doing one room at a time we should be able to juggle everything, but I'm considering putting the wicker furniture and some other bits from the conservatory outside under a tarpaulin!

The good news is that my body is standing up to all this stuff really well. My lower back was very sore this morning, but it eased out fairly quickly. My feet were aching, too, but that cleared up as well. I'm writing this at 5:45 and everything feels pretty good.

### **Monday 24 April 2017**

I got up at just before 7:15 because Pat's mobile had signalled an incoming text message. We knew last night that Alistair was back in Stockport A&E with the suspicion of a hitherto undetected kidney stone. This morning's message told Pat he was still in hospital and that Julie had reluctantly taken the day off work.

Bailey and I did the same walk as last week, but we were slightly hampered by a full-size tractor with a gang-mower that was giving the football pitch a trim. We managed nearly a repeat of yesterday and finished comfortably in 37 minutes 45 seconds.

Pat decided to go ahead with her normal visit to Anton, so I got stuck into more removals. As mentioned as a possibility yesterday, I cleared the centre of the garage to allow the wicker coffee table and armchairs from the conservatory to go in. This allowed me to reorganise the conservatory, leaving a large square space that would accommodate our new three- and two-seater sofas with room for the two heavy sideboards (I hope). Later on I wrestled the heavy solid-oak hall cupboard into the front bedroom, where there will still be room for the bed from the study provided it stands on end. I then moved a lot of loose ornaments, photographs and so on which would probably get knocked down otherwise by the carpet fitters.

My mid-afternoon my bones were still feeling very comfortable. Frankly, I am amazed at just how well my body is coping with all this stuff (touch wood!).

I was frustrated yesterday when I connected the iPhone to the PC's USB port and found no files at all on the computer. I did a bit of googling this afternoon and discovered that the things I was told to do when I was setting the phone up had imported a hundred or more pictures from the PC. Why only so many, I couldn't figure out because I have thousands of photos on the computer! The oldest picture is from February 2017, over three years ago.

Next, I tried dragging and dropping some MP3 music files from the PC to the phone. Nothing happened. I think I will need to investigate *iTunes* for PC.

Later on Pat and I worked together to get everything else we wouldn't need out of the way, including the three-seater and the two heavy sideboards, leaving the sittingroom looking very bare. Again, I was surprised at how much my body was putting up with, and even more at how well Pat coped in the face of her chronic back problems and her recent mysetry spasms.

At the end of the 'working day' I treated myself to a beard trim, a shower and a shave under the chin.

## **Tuesday 25 April 2017**

I got up for a pee at 5:30 this morning and never really got right back to sleep. I decided to get up ten minutes early (7:05) and Bailey and I got off on our walk on the dot of 7:40. We did the same route as yesterday but without the shortcuts we took to avoid the tractor yesterday. The temperature had been just above zero when I got up, and I couldn't find my gloves, but with bright sunshine and no wind I didn't feel at all cold. We covered a little more distance than yesterday, clocking 38 minutes 30 seconds, and I was sweating freely when we got back.

All the work over the past two days had left us with nothing much to do in preparation for the carpet guys. I will dismantle the computer system when I shut down in the early evening and then move the drawers and the three components of the pine desk out of the study. That will leave only the bed, which Pat is determined to leave for Bailey! When we shut the TV down I will probably get that – and all the other audio-visual bits and piece – stashed as well.

The last odd bit was this afternoon: unscrewing the mat at the front door and vacuuming the front hall. I moved the nine desk drawers into the front bedroom, leaving only the PC, the desk components and the bed.

## **Thursday 27 April 2017**

The carpet guys weren't due to arrive until after 9:30 (it was actually after 10:30!) so Bailey and I were able to do our normal walk, which went very well. Unfortunately I didn't record our time before zeroing the stopwatch, but it was comfortably around the 38 minute mark.

Most of the day was spent sheltering in the kitchen. Bailey was brilliant with the carpet guys – none of the problems we expected. He went and visited them from time to time but didn't hamper their work at all.

Once I had vacuumed the new carpets – a major job as they were covered with small offcuts and little wantering tufts – we were really pleased with the result. The carpet develops a random pattern of light and dark as we walk on it which is very attractive and should camouflage any odd bits of dirt.

We moved quite a lot of furniture back into normal positions and I managed to get the TV and FreeSat system up and running, so once fed we had a proper relaxed evening.

Today began with a good walk clocking 39 minutes 19 seconds, including three friendly encounters with other dogs. This will be the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive week of walks timed at around 40 minutes – got to be some serious health benefits there!

The rest of the day has been pretty exhausting, putting lots of other stuff back where it belongs and, in Pat's case, washing the crockery and glassware before putting it back in the sideboard. The old Hygena wardrobe from stepson Steve's bedroom in Derby, which became the office cupboard when we moved here, wanted a serious service before the doors hung straight, and the drawers still didn't run cleanly.

As can be guessed from the fact that I am writing this as the clock approaches 5pm, I got the PC and its peripherals hooked up and running well, though I had to do it in parallel with making a batch of bread! This was seriously delayed by trying to interleave it with The Great Clear-Up. We have some excellent leftover Scotch Broth made from the remains of the weekend's braised lamb shanks, and I want to get the rolls baked in time for dinner. It will be tight – or else dinner will be quite late.

In the end we used some rather dubious focaccia rolls from Aldi, and then settled down for a well-earned lazy evening.

### **Friday 28 April 2017**

This morning was beautiful, with a clear blue sky, bright sunshine, no wind and the temperature at about 5 degrees. It being Friday I was due to weigh myself, and was relieved to find that I had lost half a pound since last week and a whole pound since the 7 April.

My feet didn't feel bad but the legs and lower back were a bit dodgy, so I wasn't walking as well as I have been through the week. We met Stanley and Louisa on leads and I let Bailey get close. Maybe Stanley felt restricted on his lead, which would explain the brief fight that ensued before I managed to drag Bailey off. Somehow he managed to get his harness tangled in the process, so I hooked the long lead to his collar and he walked very well, with no real pulling, which is what the harness discourages. We did almost all of this week's route, only taking a shortcut at the end, which got us round in 35 minutes 37 seconds, with a total for the week of 3 hours 10 minutes of walking. This is the seventh consecutive week in which we have totalled over three hours. Bailey resisted my attempts to wipe his feet, but I don't think they were really dirty.

I was good to get back in the study to write this – very tidy at the moment, but I'm sure the usual clutter will soon be restored. However, there was a shedload of clearing up to do. By 1pm, though, I had the printer connected and tested and all the dangling files given a thorough clear-out before returning them to the cabinet. The quantity of paper that went in the blue bin was truly amazing!

Later on I found a problem with the PC: it wouldn't type the 'at' sign (@), producing double-quotes (") instead, which prevented me booking a meal for Pat's birthday online – no "@" - no recognisable email address - so I had to do a telephone booking! After a lot of googling I concluded that the Windows language setting had been disturbed while the system was disconnected. It took me a long time and a lot of searching before I managed to change the system language back from English (United States) to English (United Kingdom), which I achieved shortly after 5:30pm. My old friend the Control Panel seems to have disappeared.

This has been a physically demanding week, with lots of heavy furniture to be moved, but all my bits and pieces have stood up to the strain really well, even on 1½ Naproxens a days and without the exercises, which I have forgotten all week!

### **Saturday 29 April 2017**

With several trips to the loo after around 5:30am, I managed to stay in bed quite comfortably until 8:15, when I decided to get up. I made porridge for breakfast and then went out to do a bit of my urgent shopping. For Pat's birthday on Thursday I have bought her a fairly posh watch, and yesterday I ordered a fairly expensive bunch of flowers from M&S for our anniversary, but I hadn't got a cards for either celebration. Once we had decided what we would do about food for the weekend – I had already got two high-end beefburgers and a chicken out of the freezer – I went into town to get cards (Clintons), muesli ingredients (Holland & Barrett), a posh bottle of Sancerre and a frozen luxury dessert (M&S, where I also picked up *pains aux*

*raisins and pains au chocolat*), and finally some moth killers for our wardrobes (Wilko).

I will be doing the burgers with wedges and baked beans tonight and a full roast chicken dinner tomorrow, with which we will drink some of the Sancerre. Our anniversary dinner will be a takeaway from one of the best Chinese restaurants in the Sheffield area, with which we will drink the rest. Then on Wednesday we are probably going out for lunch with Pat's sister Jackie and her husband Bob, and on Thursday we will be having lunch at Fischers Baslow Hall in the Peak District, where we got married on the 1 May 2006 (I don't think your eleventh anniversary is associated with any jewel or precious metal!). This will be part-funded by a gift token which Steve and Sue gave us for Christmas.

Lunch was a sandwich while we watched the Russian Grand Prix qualifying. Ferrari really do seem to have got their act together, promising an exciting tournament.

### **Monday 1 May 2017**

Sunday and yesterday were uneventful, but I had a dreadful time in the small hours of Monday morning: up at 3:10am for a pee and again sometime after 4am, after which I never really got back to sleep. I was finding everything imaginable to worry about, and eventually I got up early, but feeling really groggy. I decided to give myself an extra rest day for the Bank Holiday, so poor Bailey didn't get a walk. It was our 11<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and I had planned to get a meal from Ka-China, which used to be a superb restaurant but had been a bit disappointing lately. However, Pat had spotted an interesting recipe for a salad including raw asparagus (our native stuff is now in season), with warm Jersey Royals, so we had that with scallops and king prawns warmed in garlic butter, accompanied with the high-end Sancerre I got from M&S on Saturday and followed by a very tasty roulade from the same source. As a treat we watched *Charade* with the delicious Audrey Hepburn – a brilliantly witty script than hadn't dated at all.

I made up the sleep deficit last night, sleeping through until after 6am and cat-napping until shortly before 7. I got up early and was downstairs in time for the 7 o'clock news – a fuller bulletin than the normal 7:30 summary but not very exciting.

We did the full football-pitch route without anything notable happening in 40 minutes 24 seconds.

### **Tuesday 2 May 2017**

I got up at 7 this morning after a much better night's sleep. My right ankle had been very painful for most of yesterday and this hadn't cured itself overnight, so I put on some Ibuprofen gel and my oldest splint.

We had a good walk, doing the usual route in 40 minutes 21 seconds. The walking didn't seem to cause extra pain, so whatever it was wasn't affected by physical stress. It was hurting a lot by the time we got home in 40 minutes 24 seconds.

Not satisfied with this, I took a huge builder's bag of green garden waste to the tip after breakfast and mowed the lawn later on. The ankle continued to hurt, whatever I did nor didn't do.

During the evening the pain in the ankle got quite a lot worse, so I put more gel on and took paracetamol in the hope of calming it down.

### **Wednesday 3 May 2017**

With no advance warning whatever through the night, I had to hurry downstairs at 6:30 this morning, arriving in the bathroom just in time for a violent bout of diarrhoea. Once it was over I went back up to bed, but things began to feel dodgy towards 7:30.

This time, with a little leeway, I managed to get dressed, brush my teeth and wash my face before returning to the loo for a second bout which was almost as severe as the first. Once I got done with that I just made it out of the bathroom door before going back again for episode three.

In the midst of all this the right ankle was flaring up again, so I put one of the fabric ProSport supports on under my new splint. With the outside of the ankle so deformed this now feels more comfortable than the old favourite Active Ankle. However, later on I took the splint off but kept the ProSport on until bedtime, feeling fairly little pain all the time.

There was no question of a walk after all that and with the possibility of more of the same, so I settled down to read the rest of *The Observer* on the Kindle. I am writing this at 9:30am and there have been no more episodes. I settled for two ginger biscuits with a cup of tea, just to buffer my morning medication.

We were due to have fish and chips with Pat's sister Jackie and husband Bob at Whitby's on the Sheffield/Rotherham border but this was clearly off the agenda for me. Pat wanted to cancel, but I persuaded her to meet them at their place and go ahead with the lunch. Tomorrow is Pat's birthday, and we were booked to have lunch at Fischer's Baslow Hall, where we got married 11 years ago, but I decided to move this on a couple of weeks.

Shortly before 10am I developed quite a sharp pain in the area of my stomach rather than my gut. I large glass of cold water relieved this almost instantly.

I spent most of the rest of the day watching *Vikings* (delighted to see that the new season of Bosch is available on Amazon Video) and reading the Bernard Cornwell Saxons series. I managed to eat a couple of slices of wholemeal toast with honey for lunch and later, when Pat got back, I had more toast with a couple of fried eggs and some of my marmalade.

#### **Thursday 4 May 2017**

I slept quite well last night, but was restless and fidgety from about 6am onwards. The weird right ankle didn't play up, though, apart from a stripe of mild pain up the outside of the lower leg. I got up at 7:05 and put both the ProSport support and the old splint on, hoping I would feel able to do a walk.

My visit to the loo was far tamer than yesterday's, but not quite normal considering how little I ate yesterday (no need for detail here). I decided to try a walk, possibly shorter than usual, and went back to the 30-minute route round the football-pitch. This week's programme has been totally compromised, so I can live with that, It was uneventful, and we did it in 30 minutes 58 seconds. The old splint was more comfortable than it has been recently and I left it on for a while after we got back. Later, though, I tried the newer splint and that felt good too.

Today is Pat's birthday, when we should have been going to Fischer's for lunch. I have suggested perhaps going to our local pub, where they do excellent food, for dinner this evening.

There was a bit of a re-think. Pat wanted to pick up some quiches, cottage pie and lasagne from our favourite butcher in Tickhill for Anton. This is a few doors away from a really good Italian restaurant called Rocco's, so we went there and shared a starter of calamari and ate their Italian sandwiches and desserts with a glass of Prosecco. Really nice. But the right ankle was feeling pretty sore.

I sat in the car while Pat raided a charity shop and came back with some really good bargain clothes. The splint was really giving me grief so I took it off and felt a lot better.

Then we went into Worksop to pick up some nice bits for birthday tea (appetites permitting) and to get the iPhone 4 which Aidan has given his Mum unlocked. On the way back we stopped at Aldi for some special-offer giant plant pots (plus wine and one or two other bits) and Wickes for four bags of all-purpose compost. I managed this fine without a splint.

After a cup of tea I had to barrow the heavy stuff round to the garden (again without a splint), and then Pat's friend Steph arrived with a birthday present, which meant another cup of tea.

All in all a pretty exhausting day, and at 6:30 neither of us was remotely hungry. Later on we each managed half a rather disappointing Scotch egg and a small portion of really good pork pie, followed by an M&S chocolate-and-custard choux bun, all washed down with more Prosecco – a reasonable birthday tea after a good birthday lunch.

### **Friday 5 May 2017**

The right ankle punished me for yesterday's splint-free exertions when I got up at 7 o'clock this morning. I put the ProSport support back on over my sock and decided to give the walk a try. First, though, the Friday morning weigh-in: no change at 13 stone 11¾ pounds.

We did the shortest version of the football-pitch route in just over 25 minutes, giving me a miserable total for the week of 1 hour 36 minutes. I hope my exertions earlier in the week and yesterday (rubbish to the tip, mowing the lawn and all the compost-shifting) will compensate for this dismal deficit, and that being careful over the weekend will get the ankle back up to scratch!

### **Monday 8 May 2017**

Writing this after the weekend, I can't remember much notable about the rest of Friday, except that the carpet fitter came back to look at the hall carpet and stretched and trimmed it. The floor underneath isn't exactly flat, but it looked a lot better when he had finished.

On Saturday I decided that I would take Pat's new/old iPhone to the Tesco phone shop (we have a Tesco Mobile account) on the way to do some shopping in preparation for a visit from Alistair's lot on Sunday. I waited about half an hour until a very baffled lady customer had been dealt with and was then helped by two young men. The conclusion was that Aidan's old iPhone 4 was going to be difficult, if not impossible, to unlock, so I decided to use the Anytime Upgrade contract to get Pat a new iPhone 5. By mid-afternoon I had this more-or-less set up, having used the method of texting SWAP to a specific number, though it was Sunday morning before the number had been transferred. With the advantage of having set up my own new iPhone recently I got quite a lot done, though for some reason I could not get Pat's to log onto 1&1 Internet's outgoing mail server. I think I will have to delete her account and re-create it.

Sunday was a bit less frenzied – just preparing for Al's lot's arrival and then entertaining and feeding them. It was wonderful to see Al looking in normal health.

This morning my right ankle was rather sore so I cut the walk down to the 30-minute version of the football-pitch circuit, actually finishing in 32 minutes 26 seconds.

Then, as if to deny my pain, I decided to swap beds with Pat, which I had promised to do a few days ago. These are 2ft 6in Tempur divans which are heavy in themselves, with deep Tempur memory-foam mattresses, also very heavy, and remote-controlled electric rise and fall at both ends. The latter uses two beefy motors, which are also very heavy. The wood in the adjustable bits started to split a few years ago and I have managed to repair them until recently, but they really have reached the end.

The foot end of my bed stopped working a while ago, with the head end a bit creaky but reasonably sound. The head end of Pat's is well and truly knackered, the repairs I did in the past week or two having failed, so I turned this round for myself, because the slats are more supportive at the foot end, and settled for no adjustment and a couple of big square French pillow to lean on. By the time I had done the swap I was totally exhausted, because I had had to lift one bed onto the other (without mattresses!) and move the combined weight across the room on our very deep-pile carpet. I made it, though and rewarded myself with two coffees and two episodes of *Vikings*.

Quite a lot of time was spent sorting out the contacts on Pat's phone: I had to send each of my contacts in text messages, install it and edit it. Having done this I decided the contacts on my phone were pretty scruffy so I tidied them up while half-watching and listening to the 10 o'clock news. I still haven't sorted out Pat's outgoing email..

## **Tuesday 9 May 2017**

Unsurprisingly, my right ankle was a bit tender this morning, so I decided to repeat the short football-pitch route we did yesterday, completing it in just over 32 minutes. The ankle didn't feel much worse when we got home, and a lot of the day was spent sitting down and messing with iPhones. The physical high-spot was putting out the wheelie bin, and Patricia cooked mushroom omelettes for us, with extra yolks left over from making meringue – lovely!

## **Wednesday 9 May 2017**

I got up – reluctantly, because I was supremely comfortable and relaxed – at 7:10. It was a gloriously sunny May morning but with the temperature at only 7 degrees. We did the same walk as yesterday in 31 minutes, and in spite of the cool air I was sweating freely when we got home.

We both had hospital appointments today – a retinal scan for Pat and a tricky dental x-ray for me. The visit to Bassetlaw, our local general hospital, went smoothly, with the retinograph done in minutes and blood tests taken even more quickly. My appointment at the Montagu Hospital in not-very-nearby Mexborough was more of a problem. The satnav totally failed to get us to Mexborough, let alone to the hospital, and we eventually found it more by luck than by judgment. Amazingly, we were only five minutes late! In any case it was a waste of time as the dental surgeon told me a different story from the one I got from my dentist. She wanted to take my last remaining bottom molars out on the spot, and as I hadn't had any pain for weeks I refused.

To cheer ourselves up, we stopped at the village local for a drink and dinner.

## **Thursday 11 May 2017**

I got up early this morning because the car was being collected for its service and MoT. Because the right foot was feeling a little tender after tramping round two hospitals yesterday, I decided to do the short walk yet again, completing it without mishaps in 31 minutes 38 seconds in glorious sunny weather.

The car was collected at around 10am and then our Jehovah's Witness window-cleaner arrived, so I had to rearrange the furniture and ornaments in the conservatory so that he could clean inside, something we don't have done very often, because his basic charge of £20 for an admittedly thorough outside clean is now increased by an un-Christian (are Witnesses Christians?) £7.50 when he does the inside. This is pretty outrageous, so I spent some time looking online for local window-cleaners and found one with the improbable name of Tina-Marie's! I phoned and she is coming for a look tomorrow afternoon.

In the afternoon I made a double batch of crème caramel for tomorrow's dinner with Sarah. There was enough custard left for a fifth portion, without caramel, so we tasted it at dinnertime. To my dismay, it was nowhere near sweet enough. I can only believe that I doubled everything except the sugar. I also over-cooked the caramel thanks to a phone call from the garage. I will have to have another go tomorrow...

### **Friday 12 May 2017**

I was awake early this morning and was considering getting up so as to get out shopping in good time. Then I heard a weird rhythmic tapping noise, quite loud, and got up to investigate. At first I thought it might be the dog retching. Then, as I walked towards the en-suite, it sounded more like hammering outside. Finally, I discovered that it was the shower dripping.

As it was just past 6:30 I decided to stay up and start the morning about forty minutes early. I tipped one of the puddings out of its bowl and left it in the fridge to taste later. It looked as if I would need to do another batch...

I weighed in just a quarter of a pound heavier than the last two weeks at 13 stone 12 pounds – a bit heavier than I would like to be (actually a stone heavier!) but at least it is keeping steady.

We did the walk we have done all week yet again, this time in 31 minutes 47 seconds. The right ankle was a bit uncomfortable but didn't really hamper me.

After I had done my usual daily admin tasks I had time to set the table for breakfast and then put everything back in the car, which I had emptied for the service.

Straight after breakfast I went to Sainsbury's for what looked like a fairly short list of shopping but nevertheless – with my various impulse buys – filled four large supermarket bags and ran the till into three figures. From then on, apart from a coffee break, Patricia was preparing food for tonight and tomorrow at Aidan's send-off barbecue for Barney. I, meanwhile, went round with the vacuum-cleaner. The luxurious new carpet made this quite hard work. Then I prepped two large packs of chicken wings, one marinated and the other just seasoned, for tonight's meal.

Sarah arrived in plenty of time for dinner and we had a very pleasant meal together: charcuterie and salad followed by two kinds of wings (plain and 'sticky'), and a delicious meringue roulade. Sadly, after a strong black coffee, she had to get back on the road home to Peterborough. She and Dave are up to their necks with sorting out properties to live in and rent out in lieu of a decent pension, which neither of them have, thanks to flitting between unrelated jobs.

### **Sunday 14 May 2017**

Much of Saturday was spent putting together food to take to Aidan's, including loads of leftover wings and wedges from Friday night.

This was only our second visit to Aidan's new rental on the outskirts of Rotherham. The first was on Christmas Day, when our supposedly-trusty Garmin satnav got us into all sorts of trouble. After Wednesday's antics getting to the hospital in Mexborough I was taking no chances, so I let the iPhone *Maps* app have a go, and it made the route look really easy. I used the satnav until we came to a junction where it and the iPhone disagreed. I went with the phone – a route so simple that I had memorised it, and which got us to Aidan's very easily. We had a lovely evening with plenty of music from Barney, and managed to retrace our route in the dark with no difficulty whatever. We will definitely know how to get to Aidan's in future!

Today was quite uneventful. Pat decided to do some gardening in the afternoon and I ended up reclaiming the boards from a discarded fence panel to make a raised bed for sweet peas. Apart from that, nothing to report. We decided that we had enough



leftover salad and stuff to make a sort of high tea, having had a brunch of delicious scrambled eggs – fresh from Millie's hens this morning – followed by toast and my marmalade.

Oh yes – the ankle (I keep forgetting that is supposed to be the focus of this diary!). It had been behaving quite well over the weekend, so I hope to get back to the 40-minute route for tomorrow's walk.

### **Monday 15 May 2017**

And that is what I did. Both feet and ankles felt a little battered, but nothing serious, so when we got to the football-pitch we walked the long way round. Then, back to the footpath, we went right to the street, did the loop last the retirement home and back onto the path. Then another loop round the field and home by the longest route, finishing in 40 minutes 25 seconds.

After Pat had gone off to Anton's – early because she has him booked in the his local hairdresser – I had a look at the new iron, which had been leaving brown marks on the clothes. The book told me it has a scale cleaning function, and when I tried this the water came out brown with lots of little black bits. There was no mention of using de-ionised water, let alone the flavoured variety sold as 'ironing water' – just tap water, regardless of how hard it is (and ours *is*). There was a 'calc cleaning' instruction, which should be followed once a month but has not been followed since we bought the iron, and I did this until the water ran out clear and the quantity of bits was much less. We will see...

Meanwhile, back to *Vikings*! I got right through two episodes and almost through a third before Pat got home in a total tizzy because of the ongoing worries about Anton's so-called care package, which is a total disaster. She got through to whoever was covering the phones at Sheffield Social Services over lunchtime. She said she had marked her call as urgent, but nobody had got back by 3:30pm. I had a fiddly job repairing the kitchen drawer that holds our table cutlery. The carcass is very old, brittle cream plastic with broken bits all round but managed I it, though I don't know how long it will be before it falls apart again.

The ankle had been niggly through the day, but not enough to hamper me in what I was doing.

After Pat's traumatic day with Anton we settled for beans and egg on toast for dinner and two episodes of *Little Boy Blue*, a harrowing ITV drama based on a true child-murder story.

### **Tuesday 16 May 2017**

I got through the night before last on just one pee, but last night I was back on three. I got up, rather reluctantly, at 7:05.

The ankle was still sore, and the right knee was playing up, too, so I wasn't sure how much of a walk I would handle, but in the event they didn't get any worse as I walked and I managed the same long route as yesterday in the slower time of 42 minutes 4 seconds.

Towards 11 o'clock, after coffee, I took a shopping list up the road and peeped in the barber's shop window. There was one elderly gentleman in the chair and an elderly lady, presumably his wife, waiting. I went in and was in the chair myself within ten minutes. Then, with my hair well and truly cropped (Nos 2 and 1) and the beard reduced to stubble (No 1) I went to the Co-op and home in time for a second coffee.

The rest of the day was fairly lazy, with spaghetti Bolognese for dinner and parts 3 and 4 of *Little Boy Blue* followed by part one of *Three Girls*.

## Wednesday 17 May 2017

For the first time in ages I overslept this morning, coming to with a jolt and finding that my watch said 7:35am, half an hour later than I normally get up. Apart from that, the morning went fairly normally. My right ankle felt a little iffy so I put one of the white ProSport supports on, and things gradually improved as we walked. I had expected that I would need to shorten the walk, but I completed the long football-pitch route without any real problems, finishing in 43 minutes and 2 seconds, just a minute slower than yesterday and three slower than Monday.

I went out shopping after breakfast, first to Tickhill to buy butchery products for us and mostly for Anton, then to Aldi and Sainsbury's, buying only a fairly small amount of stuff in each.

Today it has rained far more than at any other time in the last few months. I have been using the hose to water all the containers but this will have given everything a good drink.

Towards lunchtime I thought I would try to see why our four-slot Waring toaster has been tripping the residual-current breaker every time the lefthand slots are switched on. I took out the crumb trays, which I have done before, but this time I tipped the toaster up on its side. When I tried the lefthand slider again, it worked without tripping. I think something must have got in among the elements somehow and caused a short to earth. I put four halves of teacakes in to toast, but halfway through the lefthand side tripped again. A little later I repeated the movements, extending them to tipping the toaster right upside-down and banging it around a little. Again, it worked fine. I hope that something is moving around amongst the elements and will have dropped away from them...

By 3:30pm Bailey's outside water bowl was almost overflowing and the rain was still coming down hard. This is going to give the garden a really new lease of life.

I wore the ProSport support all day and the right ankle felt pretty good at bedtime.

## Thursday 18 May 2017

I got up at 7:05 to a beautiful sunny morning after a day when the rain never stopped and was heavy for much of the time. The temperature was nine degrees and everything looked fresh. I think I will be mowing the grass this weekend.

The right ankle and knee were a little uncomfortable, but I decided not to put the ProSport back on. Early in the walk I was questioning the wisdom of this decision, though it was the knee that felt least comfortable – twinges above the kneecap. Nevertheless, we managed the full football-pitch route. The grass was wet but the ground was firm, having soaked up all yesterday's rain. The walk was totally uneventful, with no doggy encounters at all, and I was thoroughly sweaty by the time we got home with the watch showing 39 minutes 51 seconds. This was a dodgy timing because I had been late restarting the watch after the third poo, so I logged 41 minutes 50 seconds.

At 10am I suddenly remembered that we are booked for lunch at Fischers Baslow Hall at 1pm today! This is our postponed celebration of our wedding anniversary and Pat's birthday, and we have a £50 Fischers gift token sent to us at Christmas by Steve and family. We had a really enjoyable re-visit – a leisurely and delicious three-course lunch with aperitifs, a glass of wine and coffee. We didn't feel the need to eat anything much for the rest of the day.

After sitting in front of the TV all evening my feet felt dreadful when I tried to walk. I don't know why, because I hadn't given them much to do since the morning walk.

## Friday 19 May 2017

I was restless, finding all sorts of problems to worry at, between about 5am and getting up at 7am, and was quite glad to get on the move. Good news on the weight, down a quarter of a pound from last week. My weight loss since starting the eight-week diet in March 2016 and now has varied only between 14½ and 15½ pounds in the past seven weeks. The best figure was 30 pounds on one day at the beginning of last July, so I have put half of that back on but am keeping the weight pretty stable.

It was a dull, damp morning and rained quite a bit while we were walking, and we were both pretty drenched by the time we got home in a time of 41 minutes 35 seconds. We both needed a towel-down and my trainers needed a rinse to get rid of all the grass clippings.

Lots of food preparation through the day, expecting Alistair's gang tomorrow, but just after dinner we heard that he thought they were coming on Sunday – so Sunday it is!

## Saturday 20 May 2017

Last night was a five-pee one, but I managed to get back to sleep quickly after all but the final two, and to relax and enjoy the start of a no-walk day after the fourth.

During the morning, after the sun had been on the lawn for a few hours, I cut the grass and then made a dish of Jersey Royal potato salad for tomorrow and did a bit of urgent admin, paying my credit-card bills and sending Ewan's and Tom's pocket-money for June by PayPal early, as they are going on holiday next week.

## Monday 22 May 2017

I woke at 7:15am this morning, having dropped off for a few minutes, to a lovely summery morning with a comfortable temperature of around 12 degrees and a forecast of sunny intervals and a temperature peaking at around 21 degrees.

The right ankle felt a little tender – catering fatigue from yesterday's birthday bash for Ewan, perhaps – but we got round the football-pitch route in a slightly slow time of 43 minutes 15 seconds. Some of this was down to several pleasant encounters with other dogs. By the time we got home the sky had clouded over but it was getting noticeably warmer.

Today was Pat's day for visiting brother Anton so I grabbed the opportunity to watch another couple of *Vikings* episodes.

After lunch I changed our bed-linen, which was the usual wrestle with out monstrosly heavy Tempur mattresses.

Then Pat decided to go and see her best friend Sue in the afternoon so I watched some more, finishing the final season. With that and having finished all the novels in Bernard Cornwell's *Saxons* series, which I read back-to-back, I'm going to be a bit starved for entertainment (I'm now re-reading a fairly old Rebus book). I started the refresh of my Allinson's yeast ferment this morning and finished it sometime after 5pm, when I also finished the pan of chicken stock I started on Friday evening and combined it with a container that was already in the fridge (we are running out of takeaway boxes so I ordered a pack of 50 from Amazon).

Dinner tonight was leftovers from Ewan's bash yesterday, most of which I have already consigned to the freezer: a mixed green salad with potato salad and coleslaw, chorizo, salami, cooked and raw cured ham, frankfurters and carefully cooked hardboiled eggs. The dessert, which we didn't get round to yesterday, was a nice fresh tropical-fruit salad with cream. Yum!

## Tuesday 23 May 2017

I got up well before 7am this morning, because I had been lying awake worrying about Bailey for quite a long time. I had a strange experience with him at bedtime last night, when I went into the study/bedroom to say good night. When I sat down beside him in the dark he growled more fiercely than usual and actually snapped at my hand (but missed!). I was eager to see if he was his old self this morning, and he was fine. Obviously he finds me coming to him in the dark difficult to cope with, so I will have to stop that.

It was a beautiful summery morning so we got out early. My right ankle was still protesting from the weekend's exertions, and I wasn't sure I would manage the full football-pitch route, but I did in exactly 43 minutes, arriving home very hot and dripping sweat.

After a fairly busy two or three weeks we have nothing on the calendar this week except a brief visit to the garage on Friday to get the heater fan repaired. I need to catch up on a backlog of jobs – and maybe enjoy what looks like being the real beginning of summer.

My first job was to get up in the garage loft and find some wine glasses to replace the five missing from the kitchen and the one still there but made misty by repeat visits to the dishwasher. Then I managed to find all Bailey's documentation and book to get him registered with a vet in worksop and bring his vaccinations up to date. We have an appointment at 10:20 tomorrow morning. One major task I want to get stuck into is cutting the two huge clematis montana plants on the pergola right back, because they have hardly grown at all this year.

## Wednesday 24 May 2017

I got up at 7am to another beautiful morning with a temperature of 17 degrees. Bailey was in a great mood after being a bit growly at bedtime, and we did what has now become the usual route.

I installed an app called *MapMyWalk* on the iPhone yesterday. The similar one I had on my Samsung was very unreliable.

For the first time this year I decided to leave my jacket and sweatshirt at home (not much pocket space for phone, poo-bags, keys and rewards) and walk in just a polo shirt. I was still hot and sweaty when we got home in 41 minutes 19 seconds.

*MapMyWalk* had mapped the route very accurately. It showed the time as 45 minutes because I hadn't synchronised with the watch, and the distance as 3.36km (2.1 miles). If this was maintained I would be clocking 10 miles for the week in around 3½ hours – and average speed of about 2.85 miles per hour.

We took Bailey into town for his 10:20am appointment with the vet, which was long overdue. He came away with his vaccinations back up-to-date and a clean bill of health, though at 34.5 kilograms he was considered to be quite overweight for his size and age. Once home we looked at the feeding instructions on his meaty-chunks tins and it seemed that we were feeding him far less than the recommended amounts. Of course the makers want to sell lots of product...?

It got incredibly hot as the day went on, settling at around 27 degrees in the afternoon. Pat was determined to do some gardening in spite of the heat and ended up worryingly flushed. I used a hand spray to attack the weeds in the paving at the front and side of the house, but decided that this was a bad idea, with my right ankle getting really painful. I got the big knapsack sprayer out, emptied it and tried to find out why the pump didn't work, but soon gave up.

I had seen a ready-filled Roundup sprayer on display in town for about £20 and decided to go and get one. I was convinced it had been a special offer at Aldi but it

turned out to be a regular line at Wickes, so I picked one up before doing a brief shop in Sainsbury's. This turned out to be rather painful, because I didn't have a one-pound coin in my pocket for a trolley, and the stuff I squeezed into a hand basket was amazingly heavy. Even split into two shopping bags it took a bit of a heave to get it from the car to the kitchen.

Once the sun was sinking I gave all our potted plants a good drenching with the hose, watched wistfully through the windows by Bailey, who loves being hosed but has a nasty habit of trying to eat the water jet and half-drowning himself as a result.

It stayed hot all evening, but I got off to sleep very quickly in spite of the severe pain in the outside of the ankle.

### **Thursday 25 May 2017**

I slept really well in spite of the heat. I only got up to pee once and I must have put my watch on then because it was on my wrist when I checked at exactly 7:05am. It was another lovely morning, with the temperature getting towards 20 degrees already. The ankle had calmed down overnight, and our walk went really well, with a couple of nice doggy encounters. Walking without a jacket (me, not the dog!), we got round the football-pitch circuit in 41¼ minutes. I was pouring sweat, but everything had held together really well.

During the morning, I repeated yesterday's weed-killing exercise, but with the Roundup sprayer, which was still hard work in the powerful sunshine but a lot less back-breaking than bending down with the hand sprayer.

By lunchtime the outside thermometer had topped 30 degrees. This reading is slightly suspect because, although the thermometer is on a north-facing shed wall this is just thin plywood and the sun on the roof probably warms the air in the shed so the heat penetrates the plywood. To make sense of this I put fresh batteries in the kitchen digital probe thermometer, which is pretty precise, and left the probe on the kitchen windowsill, in the shade with the tip in the outside air. At 2:50pm it was reading 30.3 degrees – 86.5 degrees Fahrenheit!

There was no way that either of us were going to do anything very energetic for the rest of the day. Luckily Pat's copies of this month's *GoodHousekeeping* and *Country Living* arrived today (I bought her subscriptions for Christmas some years ago and they have been running ever since!), giving her something to occupy her.

I managed to hose the containers again something after 5pm, having had an almost-cold shower and changed into shorts, sandals and a skimpy T-shirt. I was still running with sweat by the time I had finished watering.

### **Friday 26 May 2017**

I got up at 7:05 to glorious sunshine and a temperature a little below 20 degrees, with a maximum of 25 forecast for this afternoon. I weighed in at 13 stone 11¼ pounds, the lowest since I started weighing again, if only by a very small margin.

Yesterday I dug out two old belly-bags, dating back to my earliest holidays in Europe. This allowed me to walk in just joggers and a T-shirt without loading the trouser pockets. We did the football-pitch route in 41 minutes 25 seconds, completing the week with a total of 10 miles in 3½ hours.

We had another unfortunate encounter with Stanley: Bailey reached a corner before me and there was a huge barking session with him almost pulling me off my feet. A young woman was walking Stanley and Louisa on leads, and Stanley went berserk as soon as he saw Bailey. Using all my strength and weight, I managed to drag Bailey away before he got within biting distance, but things could have been very nasty.

My troublesome bones continued to behave quite well.

### **Monday 29 May 2017**

The weekend was fairly uneventful apart from a disappointing Monaco Grand Prix and, towards the end of Sunday morning, hauling the big petrol mower out of the shed and giving the grass, which was looking very healthy, a cut.

This morning I decided not to use the Bank Holiday as an excuse to skip a walk. I got up at 7am to see a drab, damp, grey morning. It had obviously rained during the night, but not very much, and we did the football-pitch circuit in 41 minutes 38 seconds. Bailey had no difficult encounters and my right ankle and knee were almost completely painless from start to finish.

Pat went to Anton's today, so – once I had finished the chicken stock that was simmering on the stove – I watched the first two episodes of *The Last Kingdom* – the art TV series made from the ten Bernard Cornwell novels about Uhtred of Bebbanburg, which I have just finished reading back-to-back. The adaptation is pretty loose, but the characters are well drawn and there is plenty of action.

Most of the rest of the day was spent preparing to shut down my .com mailbox which is the one that gets nearly all the vast amount of junk that comes my way every day. This is complicated, because I have to track down which businesses and organisations I want to be able to reach me and amend the contact details I have given them. I have also had to contact everyone in my contacts to ask them to use the .co.uk box from now on. In parallel with this, I have been using the 'unsubscribe' links on loads of mails, in the hope that most of the junk will go away.

### **Tuesday 30 May 2017**

Today is my late mother's 107<sup>th</sup> birthday. This brings back lots of memories, and the pride that we managed to make her last few years, after my father had died, pretty enjoyable.

I had a restless patch early this morning, when I didn't pay much attention to the time. Then I must have gone back into a fairly deep sleep and was jerked awake suddenly at 7:10 by something that left me feeling really groggy. I came round fairly quickly, though.

It was a dull morning, fairly mild at around 17 degrees, so I opted for a polo shirt and the belly bag. I seemed to be maintaining a brisk pace, with very little complaint from the bones, and we got round the football-pitch circuit in 40 minutes 59 seconds – my fastest time since the 15 May, the first day back on the 40-minute route, when I scored 40 minutes 25 seconds.

We kept up the Stanley-avoiding tactics on the homeward leg, approaching each cul-de-sac with caution, but when we were coming off the field a mostly-black collie appeared, who could have been Stroppey Stan, but he was off the lead, there was no sign of Louisa and he was with an unfamiliar woman. Bailey wanted to go to him but he didn't seem either hostile or interested, so I avoided contact.

In the evening I did all the preparations necessary for baking a batch of my rolls using my Allinsons' Ferment technique.

### **Wednesday 31 May 2017**

I got up before 6am this morning. I was wide awake because I knew Pat needed to get up and off early to deal with some support services for Anton. I took her a cup of tea before Bailey and I set off.

It was a fresh but beautiful morning and we had quite a brisk walk, finishing the football-pitch circuit in exactly 40 minutes – a new fastest time by almost a minute. My ankles and knee caused me no problems at all.

Pat left at around 8:30 so I got the breadmaking process started and interleaved it with several episodes of *The Last Kingdom*, with 24 rolls out of the oven before Pat got back after a very taxing morning. I spent quite a lot of time later identifying Anton's City Councillors and one in particular who had all the relevant committee seats.

### **Thursday 1 June 2017**

After losing an hour in bed yesterday I was really reluctant to get up, but I managed to do my toe and ankle exercises and get up at 7:05. It was another lovely summer morning, not too hot at 17 degrees but promising to get much warmer.

We did a variant of the usual walk this morning as I had to post a good-luck card to Barney, who is leaving for work-experience in Portugal soon. I decided to use the postbox which is near our usual route, which meant taking a longish loop on little suburban roads just before getting to the field. We rejoined our normal route and did three sides of the field, then turned round and did them in the opposite direction. This got us home slightly more quickly than usual, clocking 38½ minutes.

This morning we took Bailey to the vet for his second dose of vaccinations and he behaved beautifully. He was given another seal of approval in terms of his health.

Andy Murray was on court at Roland Garros for most of the afternoon, so the diary didn't get any more attention.

For dinner I did Coquilles St-Jacques – scallops with mashed potato and cheese sauce.

### **Friday 2 June 2017**

I lay awake for quite a long time before getting up at my usual 7:05am. It was another pleasant summer morning, with the temperature at a7 degrees when we went out. I was disappointed that I had put on three-quarters of a pound since last Friday.

We met one old friend, Basil the Basset, and two or three new ones, all without trouble, and a near neighbour whom I call, privately, 'Mr Grumpy' – he looks really irritable but is actually quite pleasant. He walks with two sticks and a little border terrier which is never on a lead even to cross roads – impressive training. These pleasant encounters stretched our walk time to 42 minutes 5 seconds, bringing the week's total to 3 hours 23 minutes and the daily average to 40 minutes 38 seconds.

My knee and ankles have stood up to the walks all week, which is a huge relief after the really bad patch I went through at the beginning of May.

### **Monday 5 June 2017**

The weekend was pleasant, the high spot being lunch at the Loxley pub where Barney used to work, with the lad himself and his Mum, and quite a lot of decent tennis from Roland Garros.

We watched Ariana Grande's amazing concert at Old Trafford from start to finish last night, despite being a bit left behind by much of the music. It was a magnificent event following the horrors at the Manchester Arena, by turns uplifting and heartbreaking.

I was very comfortable in bed for about an hour before getting up at 7:05 as usual. It was a dull, breezy and rather cool morning at around 12 degrees, following a really windy night. In spite of another challenging encounter with Stanley and a siller one

with a pair of stropy Westies, we got round the football-pitch circuit in 41 minutes 40 seconds.

Pat had her usual appointment with Anton today so I grabbed the chance for a few more episodes of *The Last Kingdom*. I only have one more episode of season one to watch, The adaptation of Cornwell's ten novels is pretty loose, but that hasn't spoiled my enjoyment.

I kept an eye out for the start of Andy Murray's match and managed to start recording it in the middle of the first game so that Pat and I would be able to watch it together. That took up most of the afternoon.

## **Tuesday 6 June 2017**

It was raining quite hard when I got up just after 7am, so I decided to set the table for breakfast, which I usually do after we get back from the walk, and the rain eased to what our more whimsical forecasters call 'spits and spots' by the time I was ready. I chose a different route, staying off the grass but still giving Bailey plenty of time on his long lead around the network of asphalt paths. We managed to avoid Stanley and in fact had no head-to-heads with any other dogs. I messed up the stopwatch after his first loo-stop, so I logged an educated guess of 40 minutes.

The weather got worse later on and we had moderate rain and gale-force winds all day. I had to go up to the Co-op for some urgently-needed groceries and just pushing my trolley across the carpark was really unpleasant. The rain stopped late in the afternoon and the paving was dried quickly by the continuing wind.

## **Wednesday 7 June 2017**

Pat had to go to Anton's again early this morning to meet (we hopes) a new social worker, his support service staff and the Fire & Rescue service. I wasn't sure whether she would want me to go along, so I had programmed myself to get up an hour earlier than usual. The rain had gone and the sun was out, but the wind was still quite fierce.

I have stopped recording the time of every nocturnal pee after logging a couple of singles, several fives and everything in between.

The rain had all soaked in and the grass had blown dry, so we were able to do our usual route and were back by 7:30, without muddy feet, to find Pat frying sausages.

Once she had gone I used the free time to watch the last episode of *The Last Kingdom* season 1 and the first two of season 2 – just seven more to go.

I think I have given my email address change to every individual and company that matters and could probably shut down [paul@paul-marsden.com](mailto:paul@paul-marsden.com) without loss. I am considering taking out the forwarding function of this address for a limited period in the hope that people sending mails to it will get an undeliverable message and delete it from their address books and then maybe re-enabling it. My first email cleanout this morning left only 98 messages in my deleted-items folder, which suggests that I have succeeded in unsubscribing from many unwanted sources.

I had a look at my 1&1 control panel this morning and it seems that the only way forward is to delete the .com address completely, as I can't just disable the forwarding function. Although I would be able to recreate the address, this somehow feels very final for an address I have been using for years! And if the daily clear-out is getting less taxing, maybe I won't bother...

The afternoon was taken up with tennis: first the extraordinary match in which Dominic Thiem slaughtered world number two Djokovich and then Andy Murray's quarter-final against Nishikori, which was a little worrying, but our lad won.



## Thursday 8 June 2017

After losing an hours sleep yesterday morning and feeling fine, I was really reluctant to get up at 7 today, but willpower prevailed. It had rained quite a lot through the night but the rain had almost stopped when we were ready to go. The ground was firm even if the grass was wet, so we did the usual route, meeting Basil the Basset and a lovely little cockadoodle who really wanted to play with Bailey. We completed the route in 41 minutes.

Pat had a hairdressing appointment so I grabbed a couple more episodes of *The Last Kingdom* season 2. It really is getting better and better, with several plotlines moving towards resolution which are quite emotional to watch. She voted on her way home and I walked up to the polling station to vote as soon as she got back. In spite of my threat to vote LibDem because John Mann, our otherwise excellent Labour MP, had voted Leave in the EU referendum, I voted for him – this was no election for self-indulgent vengeance voting!

## Friday 9 June 2017

I was so eager to hear what had happened in the election that I forgot to weigh myself before drinking my first cup of tea. The election result was exactly what I have been hoping for: a reduced Conservative presence in Parliament brought about by a cynical decision to call an election because May wanted 'a personal mandate'. I was ecstatic when I heard that her grubby little plan had backfired on her, and that Labour, even under Jeremy Corbyn's questionable leadership, had come a much closer second than anyone expected. I was chuckling all the way round our walk which, apart from a sudden desire by Bailey to pick a fight with a black Labrador, was uneventful. I didn't need a jacket but put on a sweatshirt with the sleeves pulled up, and was quite warm by the time we got home.

We were both booked in at Specsavers for eyetests and new frames. I had set up a page of favourites on the website and was disappointed that quite a few of my choices were missing from the bewildering display in the shop. I finally settled for one and ordered two for the price of one. Pat was happy with her two choices.

This took quite a long time so it was good that I had the French Open on series-record as Andy versus Stan was first on. This was a long match, and a gruelling one for both the players and the watchers! It filled most of our afternoon and left us sad that Andy couldn't quite beat Stan on the Paris clay and me telling Stan to 'just wait till you meet on the grass'!

## Saturday 10 June 2017

I was restless in the early morning and started worrying about my choice of frame at Specsavers. I catnapped and then snapped awake at my usual time of 7:05, and shortly after 8:30 I decided to get up.

It was raining steadily and quite hard, and even Bailey didn't want to brave the weather. I was glad the serious rain had been saved for our non-walking days!

My shoulders and neck have been playing up lately, so I decided to get back into the exercise routine.

The BBC News was gratifying: May was going to have problems getting the Protestant-fascist DUP on board and keeping the liberal Scots Tories with her if she did. Ruth Davidson, the Scots Tories is engaged to her female partner and the DUP are rabidly against LGBT rights. There are also rumbling among Tory MPs about May's right to stay in No 10. The fun begins...

I got on the Specsavers website and soon found the frames I have ordered, which are better than I thought, and another that I preferred. I would try to get the second

frames brought into the shop so I could try them and swop for one of the others if possible. I got on the phone and to my surprise my second-choice frame had arrived at the shop so I went in to confirm my two choices.

Later on I checked the date for our bathroom flooring and it turned out to be next Friday, when we were supposed to collect our glasses. I phoned again to switch the appointment to Saturday only to be told that mine would be available on Thursday, but for some reason I forgot to ask about Pat's! I will have to ring on Monday to check that both our orders will be ready on Thursday...

The really good news for me at around bedtime was that the third and final recount in Kensington, where I was born and raised until the age of 16, had returned a Labour MP by an insanely narrow margin – Labour 16,313 and Conservative 16,333, a swing of 11.11%. Brilliant!

Oh yes – no problems with the ankles and knee!

### **Monday 12 June 2017**

On Sunday afternoon I managed to get the lawn mown.

I made a bad mistake last night by staying up to watch the Canadian Grand Prix highlights from 10:30 to 00:30. I had managed to avoid seeing or hearing the result, but if I had it would have spared me a long and boring watch. Lewis Hamilton shot off from pole and was hardly on camera at all until he crossed the line in first position. Then rest of the field put on a pretty uninteresting race. I think I did doze off intermittently during the race, which suggests that one of my favourite sports is losing its grip on me.

I was up as usual at 7:05 this morning and we had a good walk until we arrived on our road, where there were lots of parents and children heading for the village's smaller primary school. Many of the kids were on bikes and scooters, which got Bailey excited as usual, but this time I was a bit slow and didn't drag him back until he either knocked a little boy over or startled him into falling off. Luckily the little lad landed on the grass verge and was unhurt, but the accident could have been serious and his Dad was justifiably very angry. I am going to have to rethink the walk, and the most obvious solution is to get up a quarter of an hour early. If I can persuade the internal clock to change, I will try this tomorrow. The other option would be to go out 15 minutes later and walk on the outside of the verge.

I had a long session of unsubscribing from unwanted emails this morning before watching two more episodes of *The Last Kingdom* while Pat was at Anton's. This seems to be whittling down the huge stack of rubbish I get every day, so I have managed to use every available unsubscribe link for the first time today. Maybe I won't need to get rid of my .com address after all. After lunch, and once I had photocopied two important documents which Pat had brought back, I processed the new load of junk mail, which only took about 10 minutes.

### **Tuesday 13 June 2017**

After yesterday's problems I had no difficulty in getting up at 6:25, 40 minutes earlier than usual. We had an uneventful walk, although there were more dog-walkers out than I expected, and no primary-school kids (on or off wheels) on the move at all. I lost track with the stop-watch after three loo-stops, so I think I am going to stop timing this walk and just log it as a 40-minute one.

We were home at 7:40, leaving me about an hour to myself. I had a busy morning ahead with one – or maybe two – big bags of garden refuse to take to the tip and the beds to make. I heard a strange click followed by pain in the left (fused) ankle just before we got home. I hope I will be okay for my tip-trips!

I checked my emails and found many from which I have repeatedly unsubscribed over the past few days. The overall number seems to have diminished but I am getting endless repeats of the same ones, so unsubscribe links appear to be fraudulent. Maybe if I temporarily disabled the forward function on the .com address all these junk merchants would get does-not-exist responses and maybe their systems would automatically delete my address...?

I got the bags to the tip and emptied with some difficulty as they were both quite heavy and the left ankle has been rather painful ever since the click. Pat had gone out to have coffee with Sue when I got back, so I settled down for coffee and what turned out to be the last episode of *The Last Kingdom*. I did some googling and found that there are plans for a third series but no clue about timing. Bernard Cornwell has said that they have only done four books of the ten so there is plenty more material for future episodes. I have watched *Game of Thrones* as far as it goes, but I'm not sure whether I have finished *Vikings* – Amazon thinks I just started the final episode *but didn't watch it*. I have found out, though, that *The Night Manager*, the excellent series adapted from John Le Carre's superb but difficult novel, is available on Amazon.

The pain in my right foot from this morning's 'click' was quite severe when I got up from my chair to go to bed.

### **Wednesday 14 June 2017**

I got up at 6:30 again and had difficulty walking across the bedroom. Both legs were stiff but the right foot was really painful. I decided to put a ProSport support on it over the sock, and this seemed to help once I got moving. I kept my normal watch on and simply noted that we left for the walk at 7:12. The foot (not the ankle) was really sore after five minutes, and I decided reluctantly to go back home. So today's record shows a disappointing 10 minutes.

From how the foot feels, I don't think the problem is related to the ankle fusion. The pain seems to be concentrated on top of the instep, among the metatarsal bones and their complicated system of joints.

I had planned to get back to my old Wednesday routine of going into town for fresh fish from Darren and any other odd bits of shopping, but it is a long walk uphill from the car park I use to Darren's pitch and I decided that this week was not the one..

Horrifying news from the area where I was born and until I was 16 this morning. A huge council tower block only a few hundred metres from where we lived, built in the 1970s, suffered a huge fire during the night. There isn't much information yet but it is likely that hundreds of people have been either severely injured or killed. Questions have already been raised about the fire alarm system, and reading the BBC reports suggests that the standard of building must have been appallingly bad.

After watching the coverage until about 12:30 I went down the garden to finish what I was trying with the pond electrics and eventually managed to submerge the taped cable joints and get the pump and the kitchen ring-main working. The short length of cable coming underground from the summer-house meant I had to work kneeling with a very bent back. By the time I was done, with the back-ache and the left foot, I was in serious pain and could barely stand up, let alone walk, but everything was working. If I get more problems, which will alert me by the cooker and microwave clocks stopping, I will know what to do.

I drove up to the Co-op later to get a small amount of shopping and cooked a simple dinner of fish fingers and some newly discovered oven chips – McCains Home Chips, which turned out to be better than any others we have tried.

By then I felt as if the ProSport was crushing my metatarsals. I took it off and felt much better, but when I stood up after the evening's TV I was in serious pain for a few minutes and very relieved to get into bed.

### **Thursday 15 June 2017**

I got up at 6:30 yet again and the left foot felt a lot better than it did yesterday morning. I left the ProSport off, and by the time we had walked for seven minutes I decided to turn back, so we clocked a miserable 14 minutes. The pain was concentrated in the foot but the whole leg was aching and feeling rather weak. It felt better after I had sat down for 15 minutes. We had to go to the opticians to pick up our new glasses this morning, so I hoped I would cope with this.

As it turned out I had no trouble driving and walking the short distance from our chosen car park to SpecSavers. We are now each the proud possessor of two brand-new pairs of varifocals. I was considering using a discount voucher to order a pair of prescription sun-glasses, but when we got home I discovered a pair of very high-quality clip-ons which I must have bought on a Continental holiday many years ago, because they are in perfect condition.

We paid a call to M&S to buy something for dinner tonight and tomorrow, and then to Costas for a flat white and a really nice lemon tart.

We are still pretty-well glued to the TV coverage of the Grenfell Tower fire. I checked online maps and discovered that the tower is even closer to where I lived as a child than I thought – just a few streets away – and not much further from my *alma mater*, Latymer Upper School in Hammersmith.

The left foot was quite painful by the time we had eaten dinner (two nicely fried salmon filets from Markies, with new potatoes, French beans and leftover peas and corn from last night), with the pain concentrated on top of the instep. It eased once we sat down but when I got up after switching off the TV at 10:30 the pain suddenly came back and was really bad, extending along the main tendon to the top of the big toe. I have no idea what is going on with this.

### **Friday 16 June 2017**

The foot was painful when I got up at 7am but soon eased out. The late rise and absence of a walk were explained by the fact that our bathroom floor was due to be re-covered today and some of these guys have arrive quite early recently, but I was relieved to have an excuse not to walk, giving me a three-day rest period.

The flooring fitter arrived on the stroke of 8 o'clock. It only took a few minutes to calm Bailey down. After a quick introduction he didn't even react to all the hammering as the fitter removed the gripper rods. The Karndean flooring, in a dark and ancient-looking woodgrain pattern called 'Da Vinci' – appropriate as I have the great man's red crayon self-portrait (bought for me by Pat in a little shop opposite the Duomo in Florence) in pride of place above our woodburner – looks really good. It needs a coat of sealer, which I intended to put on before bed, but it was just too hot.

### **Monday 20 June 2017**

We went over to Buxton to see Alistair's gang on Saturday. It was fiercely hot in their garden and pretty steamy in the Chinese restaurant where we took them for a very expensive and rather disappointing and dinner. For the first time ever, I slept all night with nothing at all covering me.

Sunday was beautiful but oppressive. I managed to walk across the road for the paper in the morning and spend an hour or more on my feet putting together a big salad. I did the sealing on the bathroom floor before bed, which involved a half-hour wait

between coats. Again, I slept without covering, in spite of Pat having taken the quilt out of the cover.

I woke at 6:20, having only been up for one pee. The silly left foot felt reasonable once the stiffness had eased, so I decided to put on a ProSport support and try a walk in the warm early morning. I managed a lap about half the length of the usual one, without too much discomfort, in 18½ minutes. After I had opened pretty well every window downstairs it was a real relief to have my second cup of tea and a very funny dose of Le Carré on the shady side of the patio. At 8:30 the outside shade temperature was 24 degrees but there was still a pleasant freshness in the air. Pat was still in bed when I laid up for breakfast, and the problem foot didn't feel too bad after the walk. Is this stupid episode with the left foot finally coming to an end?

It was a cripplingly hot day, with the temperature reaching well over 30 degrees and the heat staying with us deep into the night. It seemed that Anton's fridge had broken down, but I actually managed to break through Sheffield Council's communication barriers, with the result that someone from the relevant bit of Social Services rang Pat and managed to get the care manager at OneToOne Support to promise a visit tomorrow.

We both managed showers in the afternoon and both emerged sweating copiously.

Again, I lay down to sleep with nothing covering me at all...

## **Tuesday 21 June 2017**

...and slept right through, waking up feeling quite comfortable at 6:15 (my reprogramming to avoid the primary school kids seems to have got locked in without problems!). The left foot felt a little uncomfortable, so I put on some soft socks in place of the compression pair and the ProSport support on the left foot. My mobile said the temperature was 17 degrees – positively Arctic compared with what we have had for the past three days. There was an almost chilly breeze when we set out to repeat yesterday's short circuit uneventfully in around 18 minutes. The foot was pretty painful by the time we were halfway round but I was able to walk without real distress. I had a second cup of tea and set the table for breakfast,

By 8:30 the thermometer had reached 20 degrees, but the sky was evenly grey so I decided to give the outside plants a good hosing, and followed this by hauling the pond pump out and brushing the blanket and duck weeds off the intake grills. No sweat – literally – and the foot was no real trouble while walking around the garden or afterwards.

The day remained much cooler. Later on I had to pay yet another visit to the Co-op and managed to miss the one item that was just for me – a can of Gillette shaving foam in spite of having written it clearly in the middle of my list.

The bedroom, which is directly under the uninsulated roof, was much cooler than it had been for the last few nights, but I managed to settle with just the empty duvet cover over me.

## **Wednesday 22 June 2017**

My stupid bladder woke me – but only for the first time – at 5:30. I was blissfully comfortable when I got back into bed (Pat had pulled the summer quilt over the cover at some point), lying face-down with the shoulders working well and only mild pain in the feet. I had a long debate with myself about having a lie-in, but my strange self-discipline thing prevailed and I did my toe and ankle exercises at 6:10 and then got up. The troublesome left foot was telling me that a walk might be a bad idea. If I had given in to it I could have got straight back into bed for half an hour without disrupting my routine. Once the ProSport support was on I felt a little more confident, and we set out to do the short circuit. It was a lovely fresh morning. Apart from a slightly

tense encounter with a young chocolate Lab the walk went like clockwork, with only moderate pain. Amazingly we finished in 18 minutes 31 seconds, one second slower than yesterday and two slower than Monday. When we got back I opened plenty of windows, and the outside temperature was still only 18 degrees when, sometime after 8am, I did a poo patrol in the garden and checked the pond.

I had my second cuppa sitting in the shade outside, and then set the table with all the non-perishable elements of breakfast and settled down to write this. I need to get out of the habit of sitting for long periods because both feet become very stiff and hurt very badly when I get up. This is at its worst when I move after an evening's TV.

The plan for today was to get back into my weekly routine of going into town to get fresh fish from Darren – something I haven't done since February if my search of this diary is accurate – any other bit of shopping that needs the town-centre shops. To my relief, I managed this, with a visit to Wilko for fly-killers and to M&S for a few posh groceries, though the left foot protested at the gradient walking up from the car park and back down.

When got back I found Pat in a real state. She had finally heard from OneToOne Support, who confirmed that Anton's fridge was not working properly but were not prepared to do anything about it. She spent a couple of hours in a panic-stricken search of the Web, which I tried to convince her would not work because we probably wouldn't be able to get a guaranteed delivery slot before Anton got food-poisoning. Then I had a brainwave. We interited a fairly old under-counter fridge when we bought the house around 15 years ago, and it had been doing sterling service in the garage ever since, making catering for big events go really well. She pointed out that the fridge was filthy and I argued that it was cold. Cold won. I dragged the grubby appliance out onto the forecourt and we got it fairly clean, which was a mammoth task considering that it had survived the showers of sawdust and – worse – MDF dust generated by all my DiY in our first few years here. I managed to get it and the little bag trolley I bought for Pat a few years ago into the back of the car, and at around 4pm we set off on our rescue mission. Anton was totally baffled by our unscheduled arrival but finally accepted that his fridge was knackered and he needed another. The trolley did better than expected, enabling me to haul the fridge up the high front steps with Pat and Aton pushing. In no time at all, the fridge was in and obviously getting cold (the prevailing humidity obligingly forming condensation on the back very quickly). Pat transferred Anton's food stock and I trolleyed the old fridge to the gate for collection. Not bad for a couple of septuagenarians. They don't make them like they used to!

We had an M&S wood-fired pizza, which came first in a tasting on TV last night, and some M&S frankfurters which had to be simmered for five minutes and were very tasty.

We both went to bed feeling very pleased with ourselves.

### **Thursday 23 June 2017**

I slept heavily without a cover again last night and woke with the impression that I hadn't been up at all during the night. I felt totally comfortable and hoped I would feel the same on Lie-in Saturday! I was rather confused, and the time didn't seem to be advancing between checks, but my watch eventually got round to 6:10. I did the toe and ankle routine and got up feeling reasonably fresh. The left foot was mildly painful but improved once I had got the ProSport support on. It did protest about three minutes into the walk and then calmed down for the rest of the uneventful 18½ minutes. Not bad, considering the battering it must have got yesterday!

The sun was hidden by cloud and the temperature between 18 and 20, so conditions were quite good. The forecast for the rest of the day is light cloud with possible sunny

intervals, a maximum of 20 degrees towards lunchtime and 15 by bedtime. The forecast wind speed of around 15mph should make the day more pleasant.

I got plenty of windows open as soon as we got back and the house felt quite comfortable. At around 8:15, after setting the table for breakfast, I remembered to give all the containers, front and back, a good watering with the hose and left the end of the hose in the pond to top it up a little. Typically, it decided to rain quite hard at around lunchtime!

Late in the morning I decided to tidy up the Clematis Montana on the pergola I designed and built years ago. This was prompted by the fact that I needed to put the ladder away after keeping it out for several days for the builder who never turned up to look at the leak in the conservatory. Better to use the ladder and then put it away than put it away and have to get it out of the garage again. A few trips up and down the ladder left both feet feeling pretty sorry for themselves. Pat saw me at work and decided to do some trimming at ground level, and by the time both of us had finished both big builder's bags were ready to go to the tip. They were very heavy, but I managed to get them emptied with a little help from a kind fellow who offered to lend a hand. As our tip is quite near Sainsbury's, I stopped off there for Camembert, St Agur and Pecorina Romano, collecting a big box of chicken wings too. With all this, the feet were really sore, but a bit more variety for lunch was welcome.

The afternoon was mostly dedicated to unimpressive Queens tennis. The 'young bloods' who took out Andy and Stan were both eliminated by lesser top-100 players. I cut the big wild bass fillet into four pieces, seasoned and floured them and fried them in olive oil with a little butter added at the end. They were served with M&S new potatore and left-over peas, corn and French beans.

I slept through quite a lot of the early evening TV but woke up enough to enjoy the incredible *Supervet*.

The night was much cooler so we slept under the duvet cover with the quilt on top.

### **Friday 23 June 2017**

But not for long, thanks to Bailey! We were jolted awake at about 2:45am by a sudden outburst of barking from Bailey. He stopped fairly quickly and we relaxed, but then Pat asked me if I had close all the windows before coming to bed – particularly the two casements in the sittingroom bow window. I was sure I had, but I went down and checked. After I got back, paranoia set in, leading me to doubt whether I had dealt with the kitchen windows, so I went back down. They were all fine. I had no recollection of locking the car after getting the garden refuse bags out, but I couldn't be bothered to check and must have gone off to sleep pretty quickly.

I thought that my internal clock was working well in spite of the night's antics until I realised that what I thought was six-something was actually seven-something. With the schedule totally disrupted I decided to take it easy and have a late walk. I got up in time for the 8 o'clock news and we went out, leaving a note for Pat. The temperature was a civilised 18 degrees. I thought all the kids would be at school by then but there were quite a few older ones on bikes on the pavement. We managed to avoid them and did the usual route. My left foot, which had been very painful when I got up was only moderately uncomfortable during and after the walk, which took 18½ minutes again.

*Outlook's* duplicate copies of junk emails have been irritating me, so yesterday I switched to 1&1 Internet's webmail application (I will not call PC software 'apps!') and the duplicates were there too, so Microsoft is not to blame. Today, I was getting three copies of most, so had even more deleting to do. I think that at least temporary disabling of my '.com' address is going to be essential.

I did fried salmon tail fillets for dinner, with more M&S new potatoes and frozen *petits pois*, followed by our usual Friday evening dessert – Aldi's 'not-quite-Magnums'.

### **Monday 26 June 2017**

We went to Aidan's for dinner on Saturday evening, having yet another bruising encounter with the South Yorkshire roads: one wrong turn and we were heading for Doncaster instead of Rotherham. We got there eventually, confident that we would remember the route next time – but that is what we thought last time! Doni and Aidan had put on a really good spread centred round excellent sirloin steaks, surprisingly from Morrison's.

Sunday was lazy, dominated by the Azerbaijan Grand Prix, in which Vettel cynically sabotaged Hamilton, who had been leading all through the race, at the end of a safety car break, depriving him of the win. He got a ten-second stop as a penalty but this was cancelled out by Lewis having to stop for a new headrest. He came in one place – and two points – behind Slippery Seb. The feet were uncomfortable for most of the day, possibly after dealing with Aidan's long, steep and handrail-free staircase.

I got up at exactly 6:10 this morning – a lovely sunny one – and decided to try extending the walk. With the temperature at just over 10 degrees I decided to put on a sweatshirt – a bad move as the sun soon had me perspiring freely. I added in a lap of the football-pitch to give a total time of just under 28 minutes. The left foot was protesting quite loudly by the time we got back but it soon calmed down.

As soon as Pat was up, I went up and stripped our beds before she could get to them, a job she normally does before she comes down. She has enough on her plate at the moment with Anton to deal with and Alistair to worry about. Shortly after breakfast I went back up and made up the beds with our lovely newest duvet cover and sheets.

Early in the afternoon I got the petrol mower out and gave the lawn a good going-over. It is full of clover at this time of year and many of the little white flowers managed to dodge the cutter.

I had been very sleepy after the walk and slept through quite a lot of TV in the evening.

### **Tuesday 27 June 2017**

I woke early as usual and catnapped for quite a while. Then I tried to engage my brain with the matter of the ideal time for our walk. I decided to try listening to the 7 o'clock full news bulletin instead of the 6:30 summary, so I stayed in bed until 6:35. The feet were stiff and painful as usual when I got up but eased out fairly quickly.

We set out at 7:10 and saw no pesky primary pupils at all, so that was a success. We met a few more dogs, but without any problems. We did the football-pitch lap as yesterday and completed the walk in just under 28 minutes, still without seeing any of the kids, so that is obviously a good plan. The left foot was moderately painful by the time we got back, but less so than yesterday. I hope the extra half-hour in bed will help me to stay awake in the evenings!

Pat went out with her friends Sue and Steph fairly early this morning. They went in our car, and Pat was complaining of the rogue disc in her back, so I was hoping she would manage the driving OK.

I spent quite a bit of time salvaging two pictures of Tom and Ewan receiving presentations from the mayor of Buxton. Julie's phone hadn't done much for the event, but I managed to improve the quality with PhotoShop Essentials to the point where it was worth printing them and Blu-Tacking them to the fridge door.



We are promised rain today, but had had nothing more than puny drizzle by lunchtime. The garden really does need a good soaking.

After lunch I had a careful look at my 1&1 Internet control panel's email functions, and eventually bit the bullet by changing my [paul@paul-marsden.com](mailto:paul@paul-marsden.com) address to [paul.marsden@paul-marsden.com](mailto:paul.marsden@paul-marsden.com). I sent a test mail to this address and it arrived a few minutes later, forwarded to my .co.uk address. Then I tried sending the same message to the .com address, hoping that it would either trigger an error message or vanish into cyberspace. The result after a few minutes was neither: it was delivered as if nothing had been changed. I hope this will be corrected soon. If not, I will just have to delete the address completely. Checking again, it seems that the first two test mails must both have been sent to the new address, so I sent another to the old .com one. After ten minutes it hadn't come back, and shortly after that I received the following automatically generated email:

*A message that you sent could not be delivered to one or more of its recipients. This is a permanent error. The following address(es) failed: [paul@paul-marsden.com](mailto:paul@paul-marsden.com): SMTP error from remote server for RCPT TO command, host: mx00.1and1.co.uk (212.227.15.41) reason: 550 Requested action not taken: mailbox unavailable*

Mission accomplished, and it couldn't have been easier! An awful lot of junk-mail generating systems will be getting similar messages from now on. I hope that this causes them to delete my .com address, though it won't be my problem if it doesn't.

I currently have 422 emails in my Deleted Items, all from yesterday and today. I was tempted to keep them in there as a souvenir! I did this in the end but moved them into my Junk E-mail folder so I can still do select all and delete to clear out my live Deleted Items folder.

By 5:30 I was beginning to feel rather weird, with my Inbox staying empty for ages at a stretch. I am so used to the garbage accumulating steadily all day and night that I feel something is missing from my life!

When Pat got back she asked if I would mind her going for a long weekend in Scotland with Sue and Steph, staying on Steph's very successful daughter's newly-purchased farm outside Glasgow. Of course I agreed that this would be great for her and immediately transferred some money from our savings into her current account as she has had a fairly expensive few weeks with lots of family birthdays.

### **Wednesday 28 June 2017**

We were forecast heavy rain all night and all day today when I went to bed. On my visits to the loo through the night I didn't see any evidence of rain, though things looked a little damp outside, but at around 6am I heard rain falling outside our bedroom window. When I got down at about 6:40 the paving was wet and it was raining gently. It wasn't too bad when we set out for our walk – a 32-minute variation of our usual route, sticking to asphalt and avoiding grass – but was raining steadily by the time we got home. I had spread Bailey's towel on the doormat and managed to give him a preliminary rub-down before he has a chance to shake himself. I hung my Gore-Tex jacket from the bath taps, retrieving my mobile in its plastic bag from one of the pockets. Then I gave Bailey a really good towelling-down, followed by one for myself. Was this worth it? Probably not, but the dog enjoyed it and I kept my fitness schedule on track.

It was really weird to start *Outlook* and only see four new emails. One was a rogue marketing survey that had somehow got my .co.uk address, but the rest were from Amazon and Twitter, I had part-finished the survey before I decided it would attract masses of junk and didn't press the final button, but when I looked again after some

minutes I had four follow-up emails. Bugger! Does this mean my address will be spreading itself round cyberspace like wildfire...? I unsubscribed to all these and deleted them.

I went into town this morning to buy fish from Darren – about a 500-metre hike up the market and the same down again – and various other bits from Wilko and Sainsbury's, all in moderate rain. I had a look in the British Heart Foundation's huge charity shop for fridges to replace the one we took to Anton (and which Pat says he is quite happy with! There were several of the right size, all at just £40, but I didn't fancy loading one up in the pouring rain.

I had planned to go to the barber's for a hair and beard job, but both were drenched so I decided to combine this with taking Pat to Steph's for the Scottish trip and a dental checkup, both of which are scheduled for Friday.

Both feet were sore and weary after the walk and then these antics. They stayed that way through the day and were very uncomfortable on the way to bed. I must remember to get out of the chair every half-hour during long sitdowns.

The rain varied in intensity, but I don't think it stopped at all before I went to bed.

### **Thursday 29 June 2017**

I got up at 6:35 after half an hour of ridiculous worrying about being alone with no backup for three or four days. The head does do strange things in that half-asleep state!

to see a fine drizzle still falling on a wonderfully well irrigated garden – finally! I opted for my windproof fleece and this resisted the rain fine. However, regular gusts of cold, wet wind made the walk far less pleasant than yesterday's, so I trimmed the route and got home in just under 21 minutes, the shortest walk this week. Commitment to a regular exercise programme (for man and dog) is one thing. Masochism is another!

Today was another strange one in terms of email. I only had a few, one or two of which were not among my favoured contacts, and I was able to find 'unsubscribe' links on all of them and got positive responses back.

There was some excellent women's tenning to watch in the afternoon, and for dinner I cooked friend salmon fillets with sort of hybrid sauté/roast potatoes and frozen peas. Pat was busy getting her food and baggage together for the trip to Scotland.

### **Friday 30 June 2017**

I had a rotten night's sleep, plagued with stupid semi-conscious anxieties about managing alone for four days. As far as I know, the only real concern once I was fully awake was how to make sure spare front-door and ignition keys would be available if case I lost my keyring, with no wife with her own keys anywhere near.

The lower legs and ankles were stiff and painful when I got up but eased once I was on the move. This is the usual pattern these days, and has been for some weeks.

I got up at 6:20 and took Bailey for a 26-minute walk and then got breakfast ready while Pat got herself ready. I improvised a string 'keychain' with strong butcher's string fastened to a belt-loop so the space door and ignition keys could sit in the trouser pocket. We left at 8:40 to collect Sue and her baggage and drove to Steph's house in the improbably named Sheffield suburb of Wales.

I had a dental check booked for 10:30, I had a short shopping list and and I wanted to get my hair, beard and eyebrows cut – something for which the least-crowded time is usually mid- to late-morning. I got back to the village with time to spare so I did the shopping at the Co-op and went home for about 20 minutes. I got to the dental surgery ten minutes early and got in to see the dentist quite quickly. The check went

perfectly so I was out by about 10:45. The barber was just putting the finishing touches to one customer's haircut and there was nobody waiting, so I was in the chair within five minutes. I called at the butcher's on the way home, picking up a chicken for the weekend and a promising-looking sirloin steak for tonight.

Once home, I watched an episode of *Bosch* and a documentary about the last surviving male Northern White Rhino, which was very moving. The Eastbourne tennis was finished for the day by the time I got round to checking.

So there I was with two or three whole days to do my own thing (if I can remember what that is).

I cooked the steak in a hot cast-iron skillet for a minute on each side after marinating it in seasoned olive oil for an hour or so. It was pretty tough and tasteless.

### **Monday 3 July 2017**

I managed to occupy myself over the weekend. On Saturday I roasted the chicken and some potatoes, making fresh gravy from the pan juices, and cooking leeks, carrot ribbons and spinach together. To be honest my appetite was not at its best and I didn't really enjoy the meal very much. On Sunday I ate the chicken cold with the reheated vegetables and didn't really enjoy it then, either. I don't know what has happened to my appetite and my enthusiasm for food. By 12:30am on Monday morning I had got through the whole of the latest *Bosch* series, finished reading *The Night Manager* and watched the whole series. So a weekend fairly well spent.

A text from Pat told me she would be coming home today, so I would need to give the house a quick tidy.

At around 7pm I was poised to bid for three items on Ebay, something I haven't done for ages. Two are clothing for Pat and the third is what looks like a nice black-leather office chair, mainly for me. I won all three at decent prices by bidding just ten seconds before the auctions ended.

The left foot (the one with the fused ankle) was quite uncomfortable all weekend, following the pattern of easing when I walk on it and getting very painful when I get up after sitting for a longish period. I put a ProSport support on it over my sock this morning and this seemed to help.

I had not intended to walk today, with nobody at home to help if I had problems – a fall caused by the dog, maybe, a failure of one of the ankles or my keys falling out of my pocket (I ordered a keychain device yesterday – should be here today)! Paranoia was ticking over nicely! So I had a lie-in, getting up at around 7:40am.

I have been constipated over the past few days so I ate half a can of baked beans for Sunday lunch and was rewarded this morning by a 48-hour poo. I had the other half can today and dinner tonight is a butter chicken curry.

Today is the first day of the Wimbledon festival, one of the high-spots of the year for me, so I made sure the satellite box was programmed to catch all the TV coverage and investigated the BBC App on our smart TV and the Red Button channels. Saturation coverage, by the look of things. I won't watch Andy's opening match until Pat gets home, as I have promised. In fact I won't watch any tennis because someone is bound to spill the beans.

Only one item of junk mail this morning, and it had an 'unsubscribe' link. Getting rid of the .com email address has transformed my life!

During the day I decided that the wax in my ears wasn't going to fall out by itself, so I started a routine of dribbling warm olive oil into the right one. This left me a bit deaf and didn't clear the wax straight away.

Pat got home in the middle of the afternoon, the rest of which – and the evening – was spent watching tennis. I had managed to avoid finding the result of Andy's match, which was very entertaining, so the suspense was maintained as we stuck scrupulously to the recording.

With so much time sitting in front of the TV the left foot was very painful when I stood up, but it eased quickly.

## **Tuesday 4 July 2017**

I had a good sleep and woke feeling unusually refreshed. I got up at about 6:35. The right foot felt pretty good when I got up, but I put the ProSport support back on just to be cautious. I made a pot of tea and was out of the bathroom in time for the full 7 o'clock news on Radio 4. Bailey and I left as soon as this was over and managed one of our longer variations on the football-pitch route, completing it in 33¼ minutes. We met Fred, a new friend. He must be a Great Dane cross, and is huge but very amiable. Apart from Bailey trying to mount Fred – fat chance! - the encounter was really peaceful.

I tested the pull-out key thing – lanyard? – and it proved very secure and easy to use.

The foot stood up very well all the way round – not totally pain-free but nearly, and I felt able to lock Bailey in the house and do a 15-minute watering session in the garden. I did a quick shop at the Co-op and collected our prescriptions from the pharmacy and I still felt okay. Trouble arose when I had been sitting watching tennis on TV for a couple of hours. I decided to take the support off the left foot and this eased it quite a bit.

I am developing a bit of a theory about the left foot with the ankle fusion. Walking without the movement of the ankle joint must put extra stress on the complex system of bones, tendons and ligaments in the foot, and this could be the source of my recent pain. I will raise this with the orthopods when I see them in a few months.

The right foot (the one with the failed ankle replacement) seems to be rolling over onto its outside edge. If I put my feet close together but not touching, I can see more of the inside of the right foot than of the left. This obviously can't be allowed to go on: sooner or later I am going to need surgery – probably bone grafts and an ankle fusion. Then I will have two feet under permanent stress.

## **Wednesday 5 July 2017**

I was awake well before 6am this morning, but I felt superbly comfortable lying face-down and really didn't want to leave my drowsy, dreamy cocoon. Nevertheless, my magic internal clock made me check the time at exactly 6:35 and I forced myself to get up. I made tea and was out of the bathroom well in time for the news, none of which was very exciting.

Both my feet were a little painful, but with the ProSport support over the compression sock I was happy to do today's walk. We did the same route as yesterday, slightly more slowly because of two friendly doggy encounters – the two Labradors and Fred, who I learned was 12 years old and not a Dane cross (my guess) but a pointer, so a close relative of Bailey's, despite appearances. We finished the walk in about 34 minutes (I forgot to stop the watch at the gate). I had gone out without a sweater or jacket in a temperature of about 17 degrees and was sweating copiously when I sat down. The feet eased fairly quickly, which was a relief as I planned to do the market run for fish this morning.

I did the run into town after breakfast, managing the 500 metres each way from the car park to Darren's fish stall with only minor discomfort. I finished with a brief visit to Wilko and came straight home. We decided to go straight across to Pat's friend Steph's office just this side of Sheffield to pick up the items I had won on Ebay. This

went fine except that my beautiful new black leather office chair weighed a ton and I had quite a wrestle to get it in the back of the car and out again when we got home.

The rest of the day was devoted to Wimbledon with Andy and Raffa the star turns.

### **Thursday 6 July 2017**

This morning was similar to yesterday: up for the loo at 5:30 followed by a drowsy napping hour enjoying the comfort and dreading the moment when I had to get up (for which, read: when my OCD programme dictated that I got up!). At 6:30 I rolled over, did my toe and ankle exercises and climbed reluctantly out of the bed. The temperature was around 17 degrees, with light cloud and no sun or wind and a forecast maximum of 26.

The morning was routine, with a 7:15 departure on our walk, completing the same 'half-hour' route as on Tuesday and yesterday in 34¼ minutes.

By mid-afternoon the temperature was showing as 30 degrees on our outside thermometer. It was cooler inside, but outside it was like moving through soup.

There was plenty of lively tennis to enjoy through the afternoon and evening, though tomorrow has more British interest. The feet were painful every time I got out of my chair, so I was obviously spending too much time sitting.

### **Friday 6 July 2017**

This morning was a repeat performance of yesterday's, except that I must have dozed off again some time after 6am. Under the impression that getting-up time was quite a while away, I was fighting to resist the need for a pee when I discovered that it was 6:30. I did the usual foot exercises and got up straight away.

I was disappointed to find that I have put on 2½ pounds since I weighed myself five weeks ago, topping 14 stone for the first time since March last year but still 12¾ pounds lighter than when I started the weight-control programme. This is strange, because I don't seem to be eating anywhere near as much as I used to. Maybe too much chocolate...

The temperature was getting towards 20 degrees and the sun was out with very little wind. The walk was unremarkable, with some fairly peaceful dog-encounters including a nice one with Fred, and we completed this week's standard route in 34½ minutes, with all the week's times within half a minute of the same time.

I am getting the odd one or two unwanted emails each day, but unsubscribing on this small scale is no hardship.

The day and evening were dominated by Wimbledon.

### **Monday 10 July 2017**

Saturday was dominated by Wimbledon and Sunday by me mowing the lawn and Pat cooking a Mary Berry recipe for Malaysian chicken fried rice. While she was cooking I went out to get some Prosecco and white wine as we had nothing but reds in stock. Aidan and Donni came over and for once stayed to eat. The rice dish was delicious.

This morning was warmish at around 17 degrees, with intermittent sunshine. I had been wearing ordinary soft socks rather than my usual support stockings recently and the left foot had been feeling better. I suspect that the very tight socks might be crushing the bones together. So this morning I decided to chance doing the walk without either support stockings or the ProSport support, and although the foot was aching when we set out it was no worse when we got back. We did the same route as last week in just under 34 minutes.

Another day of tennis passed quickly, with less trouble from the feet.

Around lunchtime I fed my yeast ferment, and it was bubbling vigorously by bed time. I added it to 300 grams each of water and flour to develop a sponge overnight.

## **Tuesday 11 July 2017**

I had quite an argument with myself between 6 and 6:30 this morning. After a really good night's sleep, I was blissfully comfortable and pretty sure that if I stayed where I was I would go back to sleep. I could walk after all the kids had got to school, or even after breakfast, I convinced myself, but in the end discipline ruled and I got up at 6:35.

I fed my sponge, which had a lovely fresh sour smell, with another 300 grams each of water and flour before we went out.

I started using Allinsons yeast towards the end of December 2016 and have kept the ferment going successfully since then – over 7 months. It doesn't smell yeasty but does smell quite sour, so I wonder if local airborne organisms have taken over and created a new sourdough. Whatever is going on it makes good bread very reliably.

With a temperature of about 16 degrees and a very fine drizzle, the morning wasn't very inviting. I decided to wear my Duofold fleece over my shirt, because it is more comfortable than my cagoule and is fairly waterproof. We did the same route as yesterday and last week, meeting a couple of friendly dogs but none of the snappy-yappy ones (there is one person with two Westies, and the yappy one wears a basket muzzle!). The rain went from drizzle to what the forecasters call 'drips and drops', which was perfectly comfortable for walking. We finished the route in about 34½ minutes, getting home at 7:45. While drinking a second cup of tea, I set the table for breakfast and emptied the dishwasher.

Just before 8 o'clock I started mixing my dough and by 11 o'clock the complex but not-too-taxing knead/rest cycles were almost over. After that the dough was rested for an hour before dividing and shaping into rolls, which were put on trays and left on top of the cooker with the oven on high to prove. They rose magnificently and the first two trays were baked without mishap. However, during the baking of the third the oven element blew, tripping its own circuit-breaker on the consumer unit and the residual-current device (what used to be called an earth leakage circuit breaker), leaving eight soft, pale rolls. Luckily the microwave's convection oven function came to the rescue. I had one of the resulting rolls with the delicious omelette Pat cooked for dinner. It was incredibly crusty but very enjoyable.

I will have to get our friendly local appliance repair man out.

The afternoon was one of great excitement but some sadness, with GB's Jo Konta beating Simona Halep in their quarter-final. Great for GB, but if Simona had won she would have become world number one. I have grown quite fond of this diminutive Romanian hurricane and would have been equally pleased if she had won.

## **Wednesday 12 July 2017**

Another hour of cosy comfort followed another excellent night's sleep. My water glass was almost empty so I must have got up for the loo more than once but had no recollection of doing so. I got up at 6:30 to a lovely sunny but cool morning – both indications on my phone giving our local temperature as 12 degrees.

My feet had been quite painful after my baking day, giving me hell for a few minutes every time I got up from my chair. I had a particularly strange pain on the inside of what is left of my left ankle (the fused one): a very sore feeling in whatever soft tissue is left to cover Mr Milner's handiwork. This started again as soon as I got up, but eased quite quickly as I moved around, and both feet behaved quite well on our walk. We did the same walk as on the past couple of weeks, completing it in a whisker

under 34 minutes, with the usual mix of friendly and hostile doggy encounters. We see Stanley's and Louisa's owner on her way to work on most mornings, but we haven't stopped to find out what she is doing with her dogs.

I switched the oven on after the walk and it was still stone cold after half an hour. Oh well, at least we have the magic microwave.

I went straight into town after breakfast and managed to get into SpecSavers before the usual crowds. They checked my second pair of glasses against the first and agreed that the lenses had been installed in different positions and sent them away to have a new pair made and fitted. Then I walked up to Darren's fish stall and back down to Holland & Barrett for muesli ingredients and Wilko for a couple of odds and ends. Finally, I did quite a big shop at Sainsbury's, getting home about 2½ hours after leaving home. A long chat with Darren accounted for part of this and my time with the two very attentive ladies in SpecSavers for quite a chunk of the rest.

I made a point of observing how I was walking and trying not to bear weight on any part of the left foot except the heel, so walking flatfooted on that side. This ties in with my theory that the fused ankle joint is causing me to put too many abnormal loads on the bones in the rest of the foot. I will try to establish this as a motor-habit.

Plenty of tennis this afternoon, but sad to see Andy Murray's hip wrecking his chances of the championship and Djokovic's shoulder and elbow doing the same for him. Federer did really well against Raonic.

We had floured-and-fried lemon sole fillets with Jersey Royals and peas, followed by cold rhubarb and cream.

My feet were quite sore after the morning's activities and did the usual trick of flaring up as soon as I stood up after sitting for a while..

### **Thursday 13 July 2017**

They were still quite sore when I got up – hardly surprising after yesterday's antics – but but eased once I was on the move. This pattern is really strange, the feet becoming painful with rest and less so with movement.

It was a dull, dry morning with a temperature of around 13 degrees. We had an uneventful walk, meeting just one friendly dog – a little cocker/poodle cross called Goldie – who rushed to greet Bailey, rolled on his back in submission and would have played with him all day, I think. We completed the walk in 34 minutes.

The left foot had become more painful in the early stages of the walk but gradually became more comfortable towards the end. Weird!

I decided to get some odd jobs done this morning. I needed to clear the drain into which the washer waste runs, which proved quite easy as the obstruction was mostly accumulated fluff rather than the usual gravel and sand from the block paving. Then I needed to see if the conservatory gutters needed clearing, which mean getting up the ladder at different points. I did this using my left leg to step up because the right knee is painful and managed to use only the heel rather than the instep or the ball of the left foot on the rungs. Then I cut bits of two big shrubs at the bottom of the garden so that we could see both of the hanging baskets we bought last week.

We watched the two women's semi-finals at Wimbledon and were disappointed that Johanna Konta didn't do better against Venus Williams, who was on very good form. Jo did very well, though, and didn't disgrace herself at all.

For dinner I fried two whopping salmon tail fillets and served them with a few leftover Jersey Royals sliced and sautéed, flat green beans and a fe leftover peas. Dessert was rhubarb and cream.

## Friday 14 July 2017

I had another nice period of early-morning catnapping and snapped awake at 6:40.

I was relieved to find that I had lost a pound since last week, dropping me back below the 14-stone mark to 13 stone 13½ pounds.

With a temperature of 13 degrees and a bright sky but no sun, the walking conditions were ideal, I had a few sharp shooting pains in the back of my left (fused) heel for a few steps shortly after setting out but they soon stopped. The feet felt reasonable, with only minor twinges, and we completed the usual route in 33 minutes 50 seconds, making all five walks this week within 1½ minutes of each other. I am amazed by this consistency. We didn't see a single dog, which was amazing, and not a single person once we had left the streets.

## Monday 17 July 2017

The weekend was dominated by the women's and men's singles finals at Wimbledon and the British Grand Prix at Silverstone – all very good stuff indeed.

I noticed that, in spite of long periods of sitting, my lower legs and feet were feeling almost painless when I got into bed.

I was awake at around 5:50 this morning but must have gone right off again, because I snapped awake at exactly 6:30. I got up straight away and was relieved to find that the feet were still very comfortable.

My eyes have been very irritable, runny and sticky, with badly blurred vision, on most days recently. I have come to the conclusion that this is an allergic reaction, in spite of my daily doze of Cetirizine anti-histamine. Yesterday was particularly bad but I noticed that they were much better this morning, in spite of a high pollen count.

It was a beautiful sunny morning with the temperature at 13 degrees. We got out at 7:05 and had a lovely walk with several doggy encounters and no problems apart from the usual two yappy-snappy westies. At the first poo-stop I realised that I hadn't started the stopwatch, so when we got back I checked the time at 7:40 and logged last week's average time of 34 minutes for today.

Pat was out at Anton's for the morning so I had a TV session: Stanley Kubrick's classic *A Clockwork Orange*, an excellent adaptation of the social science fiction novel by Anthony Burgess whose work I read avidly back in the sixties.

The afternoon was very hot, so we had a fairly lazy time. This was interrupted by the arrival first of our appliance repair man, the improbably named Brian Habershon, followed by our log man with a pickup truck full of sawmill offcuts. I helped him to unload this by hand and left the wood stacked on the forecourt to await a cooler day for barrowing it round to the back and stacking it in the woodshed.

Pat wasn't hungry and ate a bowl of cereal at dinner time, though we did have a glass of Prosecco with some nuts first. I settled for wholewheat tagliatelle with pesto.

## Tuesday 18 July 2017

I had a strange episode this morning. I woke up for a pee and looked at my watch without the benefit of my glasses. It seemed that my internal clock had done its job as my weak eyes read 6:30. I felt very sleepy and didn't really want to be up, so when I checked the clock/radio on the way back from the loo I was delighted to see that it was actually only 5:30. I slipped back into bed and slept right through to the real 6:30.

It was a very misty morning with the temperature at about 16 degrees. We had a fairly uneventful walk, meeting the two Labradors on the football-pitch and a very



playful third on the way back. We completed the walk, with interruptions, in 35 minutes 32 seconds.

My feet felt a little sore all the way round, but with no real localised pain.

I did a modest shop at the Co-op after coffee, already working up quite a sweat, and the outside temperature had climbed to about 28 degrees by 3pm. I wanted to do some odd jobs around the garden, but the weather didn't offer much encouragement, especially for heaving logs, which we'll have to wait until Thursday when it should be quite cool. Instead I deadheaded the buddleia which has flowered so generously following my pruning last year, leaving only the blooms too high to reach – maybe a rake will get them within reach!

### **Wednesday 19 July 2017**

Knowing we had a meeting about Anton with Sheffield Social Services this morning and I needed to deviate from the usual walk route to deliver an anniversary card for Sue and John, I got up at 6:20am. The temperature was already up to 20 degrees!

The extended walk, on which we met neither dog nor human, took 50 minutes, leaving me quite footsore.

We left for the meeting shortly after nine and let the satnav take us on a devious route to the meeting site – devious partly because we had been given the wrong streetname and postcode! The meeting itself was really encouraging: although Government cuts have forced the city to slash its sensory impairment team the two manager we met really had their fingers on the right buttons and showed genuine concern for Anton's welfare. We came away feeling that – at last – someone was looking seriously at Anton's needs, and we left them well aware that we will be watching developments.

We were both really weary by the time we got home – mentally rather than physically, I suppose – and had a very lazy afternoon.

### **Thursday 20 July 2017**

There was quite a lot of rain on the en-suite window when I got up at 6:30 this morning, but although the paving outside was wet when I got downstairs it wasn't actually raining. By the time I was ready for the walk it had started again, so I transferred the poo-bags and dog treats from my belly-bag to the pocket of my cagoule and wrapped my phone in a poo-bag before stashing it in an inside pocket. The rain was gentle at first but by the time we had been going for five or six minutes it was quite a bit heavier. On the basis that we did extra time and distance yesterday I decided to do the shortened loop and return to the road at the village hall. We were home – and a sorry, soggy state – in just under 18 minutes.

I was hoping the rain would have stopped for the day as I needed to get the truckload of firewood barrowed from the forecourt to the woodshed on this, the first reasonably cool day of the week. Rain was forecast for the whole morning, but the sky was quite bright at 8:30am.

I seem to have virtually stopped the deluge of junk emails which has been plaguing me for years, simply by closing down the [paul@paul-marsden.com](mailto:paul@paul-marsden.com) forwarding address. On an average morning I am getting less than ten emails, compared with anything up to 300 before.

The rain continued on and off through the morning, but I still managed to get the load of firewood delivered on Monday barrowed round to the woodshed and stacked. Each barrow-load was just as much as I could handle, and I lost count after the first five. After a fairly long coffee break (necessitated by a howling back-ache!), working mostly in moderate rain, I just finished shortly before midday, well ready for a shower.

The back didn't feel so bad after the second shift and I was really impressed with how my legs and feet had stood up to the work. I think they respond well to exercise and poorly to rest.

I estimate that we probably have enough wood left from last winter to get use through the next one, but with the warm weather the newly-delivered stock will provide a top-up if not.

The legs have felt very good through the day but were painfully stiff when I got up from my chair at the end of the evening's TV.

### **Friday 21 July 2017**

My body dealt with yesterday's log stacking activity really well. My lower back was very painful until I broke for coffee halfway through but calmed down amazingly well afterwards. I slept really well until I did the silly trick with the watch again. Getting up at what I thought was 6:30 and then discovering to my delight that it was 5:30. The sky was dull at 5:30, with small raindrops on the window, but had brightened nicely by 6:30.

We did another modified route this morning as I had some cards to post: a loop to the postbox on the way out and the normal route back, which took just 35 minutes.

I forgot to weigh myself again this morning.

Before breakfast I did my usual routine admin jobs and decided to sort out the deficit caused by the £2000 bill for carpet and flooring and £600, which prevented me from sticking to my longstanding resolution to pay credit cards off completely every month. I transferred £2000 from our savings account (done in moments using the bank's excellent mobile-phone app) and then budgeted on my projection spreadsheet to return that – and the £400 I am already scheduled to pay back – in five monthly instalments of £500. From then on I need to make regular payments to savings.

I spent half an hour raking up the laurel trimmings dropped in our garden when the next-door neighbour's tress and bushes were trimmed. These, along with the trugs of weeds accumulated by Pat, topped up the builder's bag of garden refuse to the point where it needed taking to the tip, so I converted the car into van mode, lining the back with a tarpaulin, and haled the bag into it. The tip was very quiet for once, but I struggled to get the bag to empty into the green waste skip and nearly lost it as I did the previous one!

So, added to my log-hauling activities, this made a pretty good total of hard physical work.

We had a long visit from Sue this afternoon, which forced us to sit down and relax. We also needed to get the front bedroom cleared, which had not been done since we used it to store all the things we moved for the carpet layers. We need it for Monday night as we are having Alistair here for the night and taking him to Chesterfield for surgery very early on Tuesday morning.

My bones have all been behaving fairly well today in spite of the week's stresses and strains.

Wings and Aunt Bessie's chips baked on the convection-oven setting of our clever Panasonic combination microwave, followed by the usual Friday chocolate ice-cream lollies ('not quite a Magnum') brought the week to a tasty end.

### **Saturday 22 July 2017**

There was quite a bit more rain in the early hours of this morning and the temperature was a cool 14 degrees when I got up at 8:20 from my two-hour weekend

lie-in. The feet were their usual sore selves when I got up but improved quite quickly with a little exercise.

After a leisurely toast-and-marmalade (home-made) breakfast, I went out on a small shopping mission that turned out to be more complicated than expected. Pat wanted quiches and sausage rolls to take to Anton on Monday but our young butcher in the next village up the road had none – either he had sold out or hadn't made any, which looked likely as he had very little on display in his counter. I hope his business isn't running down already.

The options were to give up or to go the ten miles or so to the next village, Tickhill, where our favourite butcher's shop is. The young guy trained there. I decided to go one, and found the Butcher's shop there absolutely packed with eager customers. After a long wait in the friendly atmosphere I got what I needed, plus two Barnsley chops for tomorrow' dinner. These required one of the young staff to bring in a whole lamb carcass and butcher it – an impressive display of skill.

I stopped at the big discount store in the first village to look for some chinks for our little kitchen blackboard. They weren't available separately but I bought some packed with a little blackboard for a mere £1 and headed off to our village Co-op for some urgently needed items, after which I had to go to Sainsbury's for a tank of diesel, as we have a fair bit of driving to do over Monday and Tuesday.

Alistair is having surgery for his parathyroid tumour, booked in as very urgent, on Tuesday morning. The boys are off on school summer holidays and Julie is working the last week of her job at Waitrose, so the plan is that we got to Anton's tomorrow morning, then pick Alistair up from Buxton and bring him back here for the night. On Tuesday morning we have to get him to the hospital in Chesterfield by 7:30, which means we need to leave here by 6:30 to be safe. That in turn means getting up at about 5:30!

### **Monday 24 July 2017**

I was awake for quite a while before I got up, and was blissfully comfortable in several positions. I could happily have stayed where I was all morning, but I dragged myself out of bed reluctantly at 6:30. As soon as my feet hit the floor the left one started hurting quite badly, but it calmed down after I had walked around for a few minutes, leaving just a dull ache among the metatarsals.

I decided to stick to the current regular route, but by the time we got to the football-pitch the left foot was getting very painful, so I decided to turn for home. I resisted the temptation to take the short cut back to the road and went back the way we had come. We didn't meet any people or dogs, though the two boisterous Labradors were busy at the far end of the field. We completed the walk in 28¾ minutes, and I was very relieved to sit down in the comfy new office chair to do the urgent job of ordering our prescriptions and then update this diary. As I write, most of the pain has gone.

Most of the rest of the day was pretty crazy. We went for Pat's regular Monday morning visit to Anton's, staying about 90 minutes, and then took off on a random route across the Peak to Buxton. We had a nice time with Julie and the boys and Alistair came in sometime after 3pm. We headed for home with Al in the back at around 4:30, had an assortment of takeaway and watched *The Revenant*, a powerful but grim and hard to follow picture of the history of the far north of the USA or Canada. We all opted for an early night in preparation for a very early morning.

I set the alarm on my phone for 5:45...

### **Tuesday 25 July 2017**

I was awake at around 5am for a pee but must have fallen fast asleep, waking to see Pat standing by the bed trying to turn off my phone's alarm.

Updated 13:56 24/1/20

We had a cup of tea and a ginger biscuit to keep us going until breakfast (Al was on pre-operation nil-by-mouth). We left for the hospital at 6:30 and left him there shortly before 7. Then we headed eagerly for home, worn out from yesterday's antics and the early start this morning.

I decided to take Bailey for a walk after another cup of tea. It was very quiet until we turned round a small bend in the path before the football-pitch and were confronted by Stanley and Louisa on leads with their owner. Stanley immediately became very hostile and Bailey responded in kind. I was all we could do to keep them apart, but I managed to drag Bailey onto the field and away.

The four-in-one cordless garden tool I ordered last week arrived today. We tested the grass trimmer and hedge-cutter and it seemed pretty good. The edges of our lawn should look a lot better from now on.

The morning returned to normal when we got back in about half an hour, with breakfast at around the usual time of 9 o'clock. We were quite weary – unsurprisingly, considering the travelling we had done since yesterday morning! - so after a brief spell of gardening we more-or-less flopped into our sittingroom seats. Then we got a message from Alistair saying he was ready to be collected, followed by another saying he was 'dizzy and woozy' and needed to be seen by doctors. Two hours later, with both Pat and Julie trying to get some sense out of the situation, we were none the wiser. In the end the doctors decided to keep him in overnight, which was a great relief in terms of his welfare and our stress-levels!

### **Wednesday 26 July 2017**

I had a really good sleep after all the Alistair antics and got up just before 7:25 with no difficulty. It was a grey, windless morning with the temperature at 14 degrees and a hint of drizzle in the air. We did the current regular route with a couple of amiable dog encounters, including meeting Goldie again, and one noisy but non-contact meeting with some sort of Staffie cross who ran at us and veered off, barking loudly. I messed up with the stopwatch so I logged the average from the week before last at 34 minutes. Pat wasn't down when we got back at 8:35.

I went onto the GP's website to order the one outstanding item of mine having ordered the rest two days ago, which is the only one on a calendar-month repeat instead of 28 days. To my amazement the other items hadn't been ordered, so I selected them again. I checked Pat's repeats and they had been ordered successfully on Monday. Weird..

We now had to wait for news from Alistair, which finally came as a text saying his surgeon had cleared him to go home. We got to the Chesterfield Royal at around 1pm to find him waiting for his medicated and then to be transferred to the discharge lounge. He was very groggy, in a lot of pain from his kidney stone and having difficulty speaking as his surgery had been very close to his voice box. As with me a few years ago, we sat around for ages waiting for Co-Codamol which he could have bought over the counter, but eventually got him into the car and home in Buxton by something after 3pm. We didn't stay long, but dashed home, through spectacularly heavy rain in the Peak, to collapse after all this ferrying!

I put the computer on its sleep setting because I couldn't be bothered to shut it down.

### **Thursday 27 July 2017**

I got up rather reluctantly at 7:20 this morning, relieved to find that the usual stiffness and pain in the feet on standing after rest was almost completely absent. We did the usual route with what is becoming the *usual* stopwatch error after the second poo-stop. Me feet felt a lot better than they did yesterday so I guessed the time at at 33 minutes.

The PC's sleep mode was a good move as it woke up in exactly the state in which I had left it, ready and raring to go. I got my early-morning admin done in record time.

After breakfast I went out to shop at Sainsbury's (lots) and Aldi (a little).

We had been looking forward to the week reverting to something like normality when he heard that Alistair thought he had an infection in his wound. His GP had sent him to the local cottage hospital who told him to go back to Chesterfield at once. He had driven himself, expecting to be sorted out and released fairly quickly but they wanted to admit him. That left Julie with no car and he was worried for her, and Pat started plotting a solution: we would have to go to Buxton and take her to Chesterfield to recover the car to avoid what Alistair seemed to think was an expensive parking charge5 per 24 hours. Julie told Pat she didn't need the car and we told her we would happily pay for the parking. At about 3pm we were still waiting for news. We finally got in touch with Al and he will be in hospital at least until tomorrow. So nothing to do and no dog-neglect today.

One unwelcome piece of news which we *did* get was a call from Anton's next-door neighbour. She had seen a gas engineer looking helpless on his doorstep. He told her they had been called out to investigate a leak by his carer, who had disappeared as soon as he arrived and left him to try to get in by ringing the doorbell, which flashes the lights inside the house. There was no response, so she rang us and we gave her the outside keybox code. When she went in with the engineer they found Anton fast asleep in his armchair. There was a real leak on or around the cooker, which Anton hasn't used for years. This was fixed and the rest of the house checked. The possible alternative outcomes don't bear thinking about. If the gas concentration in the air had had time to increase, ringing the doorbell could have generated a spark. Or if Anton had woken up he would definitely have lit a cigarette. The house and its adjoining semi could have been demolished and everyone in it killed. The phrase 'criminal negligence' springs to mind.

Pat cooked some mince and I microwaved and mashed about 1200 grams of potatoes, but we didn't have much appetite. We did a sweep of unwashed TV recordings and retired gratefully to bed.

## **Friday 28 July 2017**

I was awake earely this morning and started wittling about all sorts of jobs that need doing, but I persuaded myself to stay in bed until 7:20. Again, my feet felt quite good as I walk across the floor. I made tea while waiting for the 7:30 Radio 4 news bulletin and then did my ablutions. By the time I had replenished my stock of poo bags and treats, found some sugar-free sweets for myself, got Bailey's harness and my jacket on, changed watches and clipped my key to my waistband, it was 7:47.

It was a bright and breezy morning with light cloud and intermittent sunshine. We did the full football-pitch circuit and didn't meet any other dogs at all until we were close to home and the two corgis did their usual super-aggressive turn – from behind an iron gate, of course. Bailey was easily persuaded to treat them with the contempt they deserve. For the last five-or-so minutes the top of my left foot was getting very painful, but we finished the walk in 34 minutes 40 seconds (for once I hadn't made a blunder with the stopwatch!).

After breakfast I emailed the two Social Serviced Care Managers who are responsible for Anton with a detailed account of the gas-leak incident at Anton's.

During the morning I had another go at my FTP problems – the inability to get this diary uploaded on the website using the *FileZilla* client, which has paralysed the diaru since the 21 June. I had been having a look at the 1&1 Internet Control Panel and decided there must be some way of uploading files using that, or something accessible from that. Eventually I tracked down their *WebSpace Explorer* which

displays the files on the web server in an ordinary folder window, with various icons and buttons. I experimented and everything seemed to be working – except that the updated diary didn't appear on the website. Then the penny dropped: the Open Document Format file has to be exported as a PDF (Adobe's portable document format) file, and I had been forgetting to do this, uploading the ODF file instead. Problem solved. I now have a shortcut to *WebSpace Explorer*, which I just open and then hit the upload button, which gives me the usual *Windows* options to browse my PC's copy of the site, select the file and open it which immediately sends it to the online site. Phew!

Later in the morning we heard that Alistair would be going home later today and was fit to drive himself. He got home OK with plenty of antibiotic medications, so fingers crossed.

After lunch, in a gap between some light rain showers, I managed to get the grass cut with the mighty Atco Admiral 16. The feet didn't feel bad immediately after this but later on they became quite painful. I decided to try some compression socks, which I haven't worn for quite a while, tomorrow.

### **Saturday 29 July 2017**

I got up at about 8:20 this morning after an unsuccessful attempt to get back to sleep following a number of trips to the loo. As planned, I put some compression socks on. I stopped wearing these a few weeks ago because I thought they might be causing pain by squeezing the small bones in my feet together. By 6pm I was still really comfortable, so maybe what I need to do is to wear the socks for a while but take regular breaks. We will see...

We were expecting to get together with Aidan and Barney this weekend but Barney's plans around going back to university have put a stop to that. Aidan has suggested that we eat with him and Barney at his place on Tuesday. What looked like being a fairly busy weekend catering-wise now looks like being pretty peaceful.

The new method of uploading this and other files to the website using 1&1's *WebSpace Explorer* is much quicker and easier than using *FileZilla* was – when it worked.

Major worries about Alistair. He and Julie are really struggling to cope with the behavioural problems stemming from his parathyroidism.

### **Sunday 30 July 2017**

We look like having Alistair with us for a few days when he has recovered from his latest problems stemming from the parathyroid surgery. Pat is hoping to collect him on her way back from Anton's tomorrow.

### **Monday 31 July 2017**

I was awake for pees several times after daybreak and struggled to get back to sleep. I must have napped, but I was quite glad when 7:15 rolled round. It was a beautiful sunny morning but quite chilly.

I had dug out and washed an old pair of trainers without much wear on the heels compared with the ones I have been wearing which have tipped my heels outwards when walking. They were a different Reebok model from my regulars and felt a bit strange, but I decided to try them for the walk. My left heel felt a little bruised when we set out and the pain down the big tendons to the big toes were present on both feet, but I was able to complete the usual route in just under 35 minutes. We had a couple of friendly doggy encounters on the way, but no problems.

While Pat was getting Anton's provisions ready, I popped up to the Co-op for a few essentials, calling in at the pharmacy for our prescriptions.

Later on we ended up dashing across to the Royal Hospital in Chesterfield to collect Al. He wanted to go home so we drove him straight to Buxton. By the time we got back after trying to keep things calm there and spending a little time with the kids, we were pretty weary – and by the time I had driven us back home, we were totally whacked. Cheese and biscuits were about as much as we could stomach

### **Tuesday 1 August 2017**

I really overslept this morning. I think it was after 8am when I checked the time and got up. I left a 'running late' note on the table for Pat and we managed a really good walk. I had tried the newly-refurbished trainers and decided the old ones were far more comfortable. We had no notable doggy encounters and were back home before 9am. The blind was up in our bedroom but Pat was not yet downstairs. My feet were hardly painful at all!

She did a mammoth pile of ironing this morning and I got technical installing the new wireless doorbell system: two sounders that plug into mains sockets and a bellpush than sticks on the doorframe with an adhesive pad courtesy of 3M. for £11.19. I was so impressed that I ordered a third sounder for £7.99 which we will locate so it can be heard clearly when we are in the garden.

Pat phone Alistair after lunch and he sounded fairly cheerful, which was a real relief after yesterday afternoon.

### **Wednesday 2 August 2017**

I walked without a sweater or a jacket this morning and we got lightly drizzled on, but no problems. I messed up with the stopwatch so had to log the average for the week.

Both feet were feeling pretty good, so I went into town to collect my second pair of new glasses, which had needed the lenses re-installing, and to do a very small amount of shopping.

Still whacked out from all our family stuff, we didn't do very much apart from Pat finishing the ironing. In the afternoon she went round to see Sue, who is having some nasty health problems, and I watched a couple of movies.

I cooked a big tail fillet of wild sea trout with tiny new potatoes and frozen peas. We both agreed that we prefer salmon for both texture and taste.

Pat phoned Alistair after dinner and he sounded tons better after a good day back at work.

### **Thursday 3 August 2017**

I got up at 7:20 this morning to be greeted by a grey and slightly drizzly morning with a temperature of 14 degrees. I put on a sweatshirt, which dealt nicely with what little rain fell while we were out. My feet were feeling quite good again. We did a slightly modified version of the football-pitch route to keep clear of a manically playful young German Shepherd but had a nice encounter with Goldie. I blew the timing again, thanks to major poo activity.

Most of the day was breezy to windy with intermittent rain, but things had settled down by mid-afternoon.

My feet continued to feel comfortable provided that I didn't sit still for too long. If I did, the left one would become quite painful and I would have to take it for a walk around the garden. Pat and I picked as many plums as we could reach from out tree, weighing in about 20 pounds. We don't need any more plum jam, so most will have to

be made into simple stewed fruit to be frozen and served, among other things, with ice-cream.

An extra job I had been putting off for a while was emptying the two bottle crates that life outside behind the kitchen into two big French plastic shopping bags and driving these round to the bottle bank at the village hall. We seem to get through an amazing number of bottles and jars! Still no protest from the feet.

### **Saturday 5 August 2017**

We did yesterday's walk in 33½ minutes. We had a job to do: some food shopping for Barney, who was due to go back to University in Huddersfield today. We decided to do it at his local Morrisons in Hillsborough, near the Sheffield United ground. We spent the best part of an hour in there and spent about £130. Then we drove the short distance to where he lives with his Mum, Nicky, in Loxley (yes – it probably is the much-misspelt 'Locksley' of the Robin Hood legends) and had a really pleasant couple of hours with them.

On the way home we decided to stop at Whitby's Fish and Chip Restaurant and Take-away in Catcliffe, between Sheffield and Rotherham. We had a really sensational lunch, beginning with calamari for Pat and whitebait for me, continuing with a 'small' haddock, chips and mushy peas each, one with and one without skin, and finishing with a shared knickerbocker glory. The chips and batter were amazing and the whole experience was a real delight. This establishment definitely belongs up there with Rick Stein's chippies in Padstow and Newquay! I think we should hold our annual pre-Christmas family gathering there this year. We had no appetite whatever for the rest of the day and evening.

We watched Usain Bolt's 100-metres heats, which he won quite decisively in spite of a slightly wobbly start and Mo Farrar's 10,000 metres final, which he won impressively. Bolt's final would be on TV this evening. It will be really sad to lose these two massive talents, but they have certainly earned their retirement.

I managed to stay in bed and semi-conscious until just before 9am this morning, and after breakfast we went up to Tickhill to get some supplies for Anton and some impulse-buys for us from Eatons the butchers – including two superb-looking rib-eye steaks for tomorrow evening (I had a big box of chicken wings for tonight).

We kept an eye on the athletics on-and-off all day and when the evening session came on we were pretty well riveted to the TV. When the moment for the 100 metres final arrived we held our breath, and were saddened to see the great champion fail to win and actually come third. Perhaps, unlike Mo, he should have retired a year earlier.

By the end of the race we were too wiped out to watch the current BBC4 Euro-thriller and let it record for tomorrow.

### **Sunday 6 August 2017**

I managed a long lie-in for the second day in succession, getting up at about 8:45. I had started a new log of nocturnal visits to the loo, and last night's results were reasonable: one after midnight when I woke for no obvious reason and went to unload whatever my bladder had collected, one at 5:30 and one at 8:30 which wouldn't have counted on a weekday as I would already have been up for over an hour.

We had a fairly lazy Sunday once we had established that Aidan wouldn't be at home – he phoned while on the way to York. Pat's 'little'sister Jackie rang, so I went through and did all the preparation for our dinner. We watched the Spanish thriller through the afternoon and dinner was the rib-eye steaks from Eatons, which were a little disappointing – a bit tough in places and not much flavour, so they probably



needed a little longer ageing. They were served with jacket potatoes, mushrooms and fried onions, and for dessert we had stewed plumb (from our tree) with vanilla ice-cream.

I was pleasantly surprised, when I got up cautiously from my recliner to go to bed, to find that my feet were both more-or-less pain free.

### **Monday 7 August 2017**

I was even more pleasantly surprised when I got up at 7:30 to find that they were still more-or-less pain free. They stayed so through my morning tea and ablutions and throughout the walk which we started at about 8:05 in mild, dry but dull conditions with the temperature at around 15 degrees. The walk was extended because I had cards and an electoral registration form to post, and we completed the enhanced route in just over 39 minutes. There *was* a little pain in the feet, but nothing serious. This is amazing considering how much walking I did towards the end of last week, including an hour round Morrisons.

Pat went to Anton's as usual this morning and came away quite upset. One of the two Sheffield City Council care managers came to visit and, after an encouraging meeting with us a few weeks ago, really didn't have anything to offer Anton. Pat was exhausted during the afternoon and just conked out in the middle of a promising French thriller series, *Dead Beautiful*, which we were watching on All4 catchup (this is a really rich source of quality entertainment). She came to later and we finished watching the 90-minute episode – the first of nine. It's about ten years old, but good solid stuff.

Dinner tonight was two individual steak pies from Eatons, with mushy peas and leftover gravy.

We're hoping for a quiet week, but with Pat's family anything can happen...

(I am now going to upload this version to the website, just because the new method is so much easier and more reliable than the FTP clients I was using before.)

### **Tuesday 8 August 2017**

The forecast yesterday for today was alternating heavy and lighter rain, and when I got up at 7:20 this morning it was raining steadily. A look outside and a listen to the rain on the conservatory roof convinced me that an early walk would be pretty dismal. I hoped things would be better later on, but if not we could always forget today and walk on Saturday.

Lying in bed worrying, as one does, I thought our boiler-care insurance company might have gone out of business without letting us know, but a check of the bank-account spreadsheet confirmed that the monthly direct debit was still going out. That in turn had me concerned that the bathroom flooring guy had not actually demonstrated how to open the hatch that gives access to the stopcock. No worries: the boiler man can figure that out when he does the service next month.

Sometime after 8:15 the rain stopped, so we went out. A little later it started again, but quite lightly. Nevertheless, we were pretty wet by the time we got home. I managed to prevent Bailey shaking himself by dangling by his collar and dragging him into the kitchen, latching the door behind me. We both had a good towel-down and he opted not to go out into the garden, which is what he usually does when we get home.

Pat was feeling pretty low after yesterday at Anton's so we spent a large slab of the morning with coffee and biscuits, with her swapping washer and drier loads periodically.

I received a 'Notice of Intended Prosecution' from Derbyshire Constabulary in the post. It seems that I hit 39mph in the wrong place after taking Alistair home from the hospital last Monday. The penalty is now a £100 fine with three points, but I may have the option to attend a speed awareness course as the last one I went on was at least 15 years ago. Failure to get it back to the police in good time results in the case being brought before a magistrate, and the charge is failing to provide information required by the police, for which the penalty is a fine of £1000.

After a snack lunch it was actually Pat who suggested watching the next part of the French thriller. To my amazement, when that ended she suggested watching another, which brought us round to dinner time – wholegrain spaghetti with basil pesto followed by ice-cream and stewed plums (again).

I can't remember what we watched in the evening.

### **Wednesday 9 August 2017**

It rained for most of the night but had more-or-less stopped by the time I got up, and had stopped completely by the time we went out at about 7:50. The grass wasn't as wet as it had been yesterday so my shoes didn't get so waterlogged and Bailey didn't need towelling down.

My feet and legs were aching as we walked – 'footsore', I suppose – but there was no sharp local pain in either. The horrible ancient trainers are still working well, despite the worn-down heels.

We thought of going to a fabric warehouse in Mansfield, but the satnav, with its old maps, couldn't find the address, and I couldn't track it down on Google maps or my old OS Nottinghamshire street atlas either. It must be on a fairly newly-built trading estate. While I was trying to figure out where it was my bowels decided to play games with me, possibly because I have eaten too many stewed plums with my ice cream desserts this week. We decided to try again tomorrow. Meanwhile – by some means I didn't understand at all – I had got the satnav to recognise the address!

Before lunch I completed the form that came with the Notice of Intended Prosecution, and sealed it in an envelope with Sellotape because the self-adhesive coating had long-since dried up, and affixed one of Ellie's reclaimed stamps. After lunch Bailey and I took the envelope up to one of our two Post Offices, a round trip of between 15 and 20 minutes. We met two dogs, one of which wasn't friendly and the other – a Staffy – who was aggressive.

By 2:30 there had been no more rain and my feet felt okay.

### **Thursday 10 August 2017**

I got up at 7:20 on a beautiful but fresh – 11 degrees – sunny morning. We did the usual route, with a few pleasant doggy encounters, in about 34 minutes, with me sweating freely in spite of the low temperature. The sun is noticeably lower already as the nights lengthen and the days shorten.

Before going out on a shopping trip chosen by Pat, I got my digital tyre pump out and got all four wheels on the car to the right pressure – a long job on the nearside rear because it gets bumped on the kerb every time we turn in to our forecourt. I had big problems with our ancient Garmin satnav which got thoroughly confused but managed to lock in on our destination in Mansfield and give me spoken directions, although the map display had gone totally crazy.

The trip was to a fabric discount warehouse to find something to dog-proof our fabric-covered sofas, and the most promising design met us as soon as we walked through the door. We spent a long time looking at alternatives but kept returning to the first

material. The pattern and colours harmonise nicely with the covers on the sofas and footstool, so we bought 6 metres and relied on road signs to navigate us home.

Later on I did a survey of new Garmins and bought a 6-inch model (a Nuvi 68) from Amazon. From what I read, GPS navigation has moved a long way since we bought our wobbly one. The costs have dropped as well: I am fairly sure we paid over £200 for our first unit and the new one was only £144 from Amazon.

My failing eyes should benefit from a larger and brighter screen and a far more sophisticated display which shows both a map and pictures of what should be ahead. It even shows a clear speed-limit sign for the road you are driving, which may help me to avoid another speeding offence.

This evening, after fried salmon fillets with small jacket potatoes cooked using our Panasonic combi oven's automatic microwave/convection program – a lot faster than an ordinary oven – with some leftover home-made mushy peas, my left foot began behaving oddly and painfully. Before things became more settled recently, I was used to it being pain-free while sitting but becoming very painful when I stood up. Tonight the top of the foot developed an unpleasant ache and then waves of sharp pain. I got up to take some pain-killers, and by the time I sat back down the pain had subsided – the opposite of what used to happen. I was very glad to get off to bed after the news.

### **Friday 11 August 2017**

I didn't get round to updating the diary today. We did the last walk of the week in 33 minutes 47 seconds. I did a shop in Sainsbury's and Aldi, starting with the small list and spending a small fortune, all on quite sensible purchases.

To my amazement the new satnav arrived in the afternoon, probably less than 24 hours after I ordered it, and it didn't seem to work as intuitively as the old Nuvi 310. I couldn't get it to wake up when it was connected to either nothing or the computer, and ended the day very frustrated.

Dinner was chicken wings, chips and coleslaw followed by an Aldi choc-ice lolly.

### **Saturday 12 August 2017**

I tossed and turned for an hour or so after waking up, worrying about things – mainly the new satnav. Eventually I got fed up and had another look at it. I knew it had seemed a lot livelier when I installed it in the car so I decided to try giving it a look at the satellites in the conservatory. This allowed it to wake up and look a lot more like the old unit. Then I had a brainwave and registered the old one on the *Garmin Express* software and was almost immediately offered the option to copy the data from the old unit to the new one. Bingo! All my old destinations are now on the new satnav! Even better, when I had a look at its monstrous database of businesses it had loads, even just in our village. I typed 'Eatons' into the search box and it came back with 'Eatons butchers'. When I tapped that entry it set itself to navigate to Tickhill. Magic!

The satnav's HELP facility enabled me to delete lots of redundant favourites and the explore a range of settings which I hadn't found. I think I'm pretty well on top of the unit now. It actually lacks some of the refinements of the old unit – giving favourites a name and a whole address, for example – which is rather surprising. To compensate, the screen's 155mm diagonal contrasts with the old units 90mm.

I had printed the 20-page Garmin user manual earlier, but everything I did was managed without its help. It seems that once it has been initialised the Garmin can pick up the satellites even in the house.

This morning I found out how to increase the sizes of text and other things on the PC screen and set this to 125% to make my poor old eyes cope a bit better (an

increasingly serious problem I haven't dwelt on in this diary but will probably deal with in more detail after my next appointment at the hospital eye clinic on the 11 October). This made the screen a bit crowded but quite a lot easier to read.

Dinner was salmon again, this time with stir-fried vegetables and fine noodles, plenty of which would be left over to take to Anton on Monday.

### **Sunday 13 August 2017**

A very ordinary Sunday, except that I spent quite a lot of time exploring the Garmin and also a lot in the kitchen. I slow-cooked two lamb shanks in red wine and made lots of mash with Sainsbury's organic Lady Balfour potatoes. I put a can of haricot beans in with the lamb to create a cassoulet effect, and was pleased to see that the dish would spread over two meals.

### **Monday 14 August 2017**

Back in the weekday routine, though I was comfortable enough from around 6am onwards not to want to get up early. However I did so at 7:15. It was a pleasant mild morning and Bailey and I had an enjoyable and more-or-less uneventful walk, meeting very few dogs.

I went to Anton's with Pat today because I had bought six Philips LED light-bulbs (13-watts consumption with a light output equivalent to an ordinary 100-watt bulb!) for him. We had a nightmare in his sitting room dealing with the collapsing electrics but eventually got two of the bulbs installed.

The soft pouch I had ordered for the new satnav was on the doormat when we got home.

We were tired, sweaty and fed-up by the time we got home and spent most of the afternoon watching an unusual and really intriguing new Norwegian drama series called *Valkerien* on the *All4* catchup app.

I warmed the leftover lamb for dinner, which made it a bit tough, but the beans, peas and gravy were great.

### **Tuesday 15 August 2017**

I was awake quite early this morning but dropped off and came to at almost exactly 7:15. I did the usual toe and ankle exercises, put Murine eye drops in my eyes (two in each eye seems to be more effective than one) and went downstairs for a warm welcome from Bailey.

He must have been particularly eager for his walk because he whined while I was shut in the bathroom – something he has never done before.

It was a beautiful morning, though still quite fresh at 15 degrees. We had a few doggy encounters, one a little snarly. The low sun was really hot and I was very sweaty when we got home. I managed not to mess the timing up so I recorded a true 34 minutes 26 seconds.

After breakfast I went upstairs and stripped out beds, then put on the fitted sheets, pillowcases and duvet cover. I had intended to bring the lightweight vacuum up but had forgotten, but Patricia brought the heavy Sebo up – enough of the strain for me, let alone for her! I vacuumed all round while she was in the shower and while I was in the shower she went round all the corners. Women!

After that I popped up to the Co-op for half a dozen odds and ends of shopping.

During the late afternoon we watched the second, third and fourth episodes of *Valkerien* – the story getting stranger but certainly gripping. For dinner I cooked

linguine with sundried tomato pesto and Pat had got some stewed prunes out of the freezer to serve with ice-cream.

### **Wednesday 16 August 2017**

My stupid bladder, after getting me up at 5:30, drove me out of bed at 7:10, much to Bailey's delight. We got off for the walk at 7:45, clocking 34¾ minutes for the usual route. Bailey got a bit hostile when we passed a man with two tiny lap-dogs on leads but had a friendly, if brief, encounter with Goldie the fast-growing Cockerdoodle (I think) who was very pleased to see him.

My feet – mainly the tope of the left – felt better when we got back than they had at the outset. The fact that the supposedly mended left foot (fused ankle) has been giving me far more pain than the right with its 'catastrophically failed' ankle replacement, is troubling. Fortunately I have a hospital appointment for both ankles in just under two months.

I decided to go up to the next village to get my hair and beard cut. I have found around 11:30am to be about the quietest time, but I got impatient and went up about an hour earlier. I ended up waiting about half an hour, but as I had synchronised the Kindle app on my phone with my 'proper' Kindle I was able to pick up my book where I left off last night.

Before lunch I went out and trimmed the bushes which were overhanging the pavement. Pat had been complaining about them for some time, in spite of the fact that I did the job earlier in the summer. Wednesday.

For dinner I made Coquilles St-Jacques, using a whole bag of Aldi Sweet Scallops and the leftover mash from the weekend, adding a rich Béchamel with cream and the dregs of the sprinkling cheese left from Tuesday's linguine and browning it lightly under the grill.

### **Thursday 17 August 2017**

I was summoned to the loo at about 5:30 this morning and saw that the forecast rain had arrived. I catnapped until about 7 and got up at quarter-past. By then the rain had stopped.

Bailey had a funny few minutes when I got downstairs, doing a shortened version of what he does when we have both been out for a long time, tearing around the house in full greyhound mode. When I let him out he went down the garden like a rocket but came back in about five minutes.

The temperature was about 16 degrees, so I decided to risk just a sweatshirt: if I got drenched, tough! We didn't have any close encounters with other dogs, though there was a strange one when we were nearly home. Turning a corner in the footpath he saw a guy with a small terrier and a Springer on leads. I don't know who growled first, but I had to drag Bailey away while the other guy retreated with his two. We finished the walk in 33 minutes 50 seconds, dry on the outside but with me very sweaty.

After various jobs in the morning, we settled down to finish watching *Valkerien*, which continued to be very far-fetched but quite gripping.

Having reported a problem uploading content to this site to 1&1 Internet's support line, I checked for an email response later and found nothing, but when I tried again the files were installed successfully. Maybe somebody corrected a fault but didn't bother to let me know.

I thought yesterday that this document might have become too long to be uploaded, so I had cut it into two, starting the second section at the beginning of 2017. These had still failed to upload, but I should be able to sort everything out tomorrow.

Dinner was the whitebait ready meal I bought from Aldi last week. I liked them but Pat wasn't thrilled – too much skin and bone inside the crumb crust. On the other hand she liked Aunt Bessie's chips more than I did – I find them very dry inside.

### **Friday 18 August 2017**

After only two pees during the night, the second at around 4:30, my bladder was disturbing me before 7 o'clock. I tried lying on my sides and on my back rather than face-down, which puts more pressure on it, but gave up at 7:10 and got up.

It was a beautiful morning with the temperature at around 15 degrees, so I opted for a sweatshirt and my 'sporrán' again. We had a shock at the gate going out as a remote neighbour with a black Labrador was about to walk past as we stepped out. There was a moment of snarling and growling all round before the Lab and his master crossed the road. The rest of the walk was uneventful, with only a very friendly encounter with Goldie and a much calmer one with the old retriever and his old owner. We finished the walk, with aching legs and feet on my part, but no sharp local pain, in 33 minutes 53 seconds.

I put this document back together before breakfast, and it uploaded flawlessly.

I had an interesting little problem this afternoon. I was reading a text message which Pat had sent to Anton's carers when her iPhone 5 just died. Nothing I did with the buttons got any response out of it at all. If it had been one of our old Samsungs I would just have popped the battery out and back in, which would normally have solved the problem, but Apple don't let you inside their iconic phones. Thanks to Google, I found several suggestions that I hold the power and home buttons together down for over ten seconds, after which the Apple icon should appear. I did as recommended and this brought the phone straight back to life. Phew! Bloody Apple!

I'm getting sick of even the most highly recommended oven chips, so I made garlic wedges with the last Lady Balfour organic potatoes left in the cupboard to go with the usual wings. I sliced a few cloves of garlic and infused them gently in olive oil in which I marinated the wedged after parboiling and before roastling. Much nicer than Aunt Bessie's chips!

### **Saturday 19 August 2017**

We went over to Buxton to see Alistair and the gang, and ended up taking them out for lunch. Someone mentioned Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, and I remembered having lunch there regularly when I was doing IT support in the town's schools. I remembered having really good food and beer, but I couldn't remember the brewery. We decided to give it a try and were not disappointed. All the main beers were hand-pumped, though from breweries of which I had never heard. In fact they were all brewed locally and looked quite adventurous (Plum Porter?). Between us Alistair, Julie and I tried three and we were all impressed. The food was all excellent, too, and when I settled the tab I was agreeably surprised by the good value (it worked out at about a tenner a head for four adults and two hungry boys, brinks included). I tracked the pub's history and finally confirmed that the Cheese had been tied to the Kimberley brewery founded in the 1800's by Hardy & Hanson. It had been linked to several newer breweries but now seems to be a free house.

For once, nostalgia paid off!

### **Sunday 20 August 2017**

We went to Aidan's for a barbecue, managing not to get lost on the way there and back, and had a very enjoyable afternoon being serenaded on the guitars by Aidan himself and son Barney. Aidan's partner Donni is a chef, and Bulgarian, which showed in the lovely salads she had made. Barney will be going back to University in

Huddersfield tomorrow, so there was much hugging when we left. Aidan and Donnie are off to Bulgaria for a fortnight, so we swapped satnavs because our new one covers the whole of Europe.

### **Monday 21 August 2017**

I was restless early this morning, so I got up early – at about 7:05. It was a lovely sunny morning, though fresh at 12 degrees, and Bailey and I had a good walk, doing the usual route with no encounters, friendly or otherwise, in 32 minutes 40 seconds. My left foot got quite sore by the 20-minute mark but recovered during the day.

After last week's horror-story with Anton's lights, with Pat holding the torch and me teetering on a rickety stepladder and getting either my head or my hand blocking the light, I managed to find the rather tatty head-torch I bought some years ago. It turned out to be knackered so I ordered a new one from Amazon which arrived today. What a difference. It is rechargeable, with mains and car chargers and two beefy batteries of a type I have never met before like overgrown AA cells but are lithium-ion rated at 3.7 volts output and 2500mAH capacity and live in a padded box at the back of the user's head. It throws out a big circle of very bright light, though there is a lower setting and, for some reason as strobe setting, neither of which are likely to be of much use. You can also zoom the beam to concentrate it on a smaller or larger area. It is rather a lot of weight to wear on the head, but worth it, and it only cost a paltry £14.99! The guy who won the Nobel Prize for Physics for developing white LEDs really deserved it. They're everywhere, from torches to car headlights. I think credit should also go to China, which I assume is where the light was made.

Tonight's dinner was lamb chops from the newly-discovered farm shop on the way to Buxton, with new potatoes and frozen *petits-pois*.

### **Tuesday 22 August 2017**

This morning was dull and rather humid, with a temperature of 17 degrees, so I went out without either a sweatshirt or a jacket, and still worked up a good sweat. I forgot to start the watch until we were a couple of minutes out so I didn't stop it for poo breaks (3). The timing went even further adrift when we met a lovely 5-month-old black Lab, still only about half size, who made a huge fuss of Bailey. His name was Loki. We also met the old retriever with his old master and a woman with two poodl-ish dogs, one of which reacted very aggressively to Bailey. He responded and I had a real job controlling him. With all this going on, we clocked 36½, so I used last week's average of 34 minutes 9 seconds for the statistics.

We went into town in the middle of the morning for an essential visit to Boots and a non-essential but enjoyable first visit to Farm Foods, from whom we had received a promotional leaflet showing some amazing savings. We brought a large trolley-full of frozen and other stuff, spending over £100 but getting some amazing bargains.

Dinner was linguine with red pesto followed by ice cream and stewed plums.

After the shopping trip my left ankle began putting me through spells of quite severe pain. This continued through our lazy afternoon, with a throbbing ache around the ankle when I was sitting and really sharp pain on the inside of the ankle when I got up and put weight on it, so bad that I had to lift the foot to relieve it. I managed to produce a pan of linguine with red pesto, but I was dubious about getting upstairs at bedtime. The pain eased after a few minutes on my feet, though, and I managed the stairs with less trouble than I expected.

### **Wednesday 23 August 2017**

I got up at 7:05 this morning, having spent about 90 minutes trying unsuccessfully to get back to sleep after a pee. It was a warm but dull and damp morning with

evidence of some rain earlier, and at around 17 degrees it felt really humid. The feet felt reasonably good when I was up and I managed the walk with nothing but mild twinges – really weird after last night. We finished the walk in about the same time as yesterday with two brief, light showers while we were out. The BBC forecast was for a couple of hours of heavy rain starting around 9am, which would have been very welcome for the garden, but it must have gone somewhere else!

I made an unfortunate choice today. I had a list of non-urgent odds and ends for a trip to Sainsbury's, which I could have left for any time today or the rest of the week. As it turned out I made a very bad choice, and when I finished loading my shopping into the boot I watched helplessly as a strange little woman in a Corsa hit my offside rear wheel arch. There wasn't much damage, but enough to need a repair, so I spent the rest of the afternoon doing an online insurance claim.

For dinner I did an 'all day breakfast' – bacon, sausage and egg with hash browns, baked beans, mushrooms and tomatoes – a refreshing change. The left foot protested a bit while I was cooking but I coped okay. Later on, every time I got up from my chair, the foot was very painful for a short time, with pain shooting across the top of the foot and up the inside of the ankle so severely that I had to stop walking for a few seconds (and have a good swear!).

### Thursday 24 August 2017

The foot was quite painful when I got up but eased after walking around the house. It was a beautiful morning with bright sun, a temperature of 16 degrees and no perceptible wind. The foot still hurt quite a bit when we set out, but stayed at about the same level until we were about half-way round our circuit. By the time we were five minutes away from home I was really struggling with the pain and I was very relieved when, with the stopwatch showing a pathetic 36 minutes and 53 seconds, we got in and I could take my trainers off. I spent the rest of the morning in stockinged feet and felt much more comfortable. Could my ancient Reeboks be at fault? I decided that should give the Hi-Tec walking shoes I bought a couple of years ago – and with which I have never come to terms – a try. They felt weird to begin with but became quite comfortable as the morning went on and by lunchtime my feet were feeling almost pain-free, whether I was walking around for a while or getting up from a sit-down. Breakthrough – or what?

Pat went out with 'the girls' this morning, which gave me time to listen to the first two episodes of *Aleks in Wonderland*, a history of the Internet and the Web on Radio 4, on the BBC iPlayer. To my disgust, the version of the iPlayer on our smart TV only seemed to offer programmes from one radio channel, Radio 1. I tried the TV's app store, but no other *iplayer* product was on offer, so I had to use the Web-based iPlayer, which covers all BBC channels and stations. No matter – I have my super-de-luxe office chair now.

The history took me back to the '80s, when my first online experiences were with incredibly slow modems connected to the phone line – either 300 bits-per-second ('baud') for upload and download or 1200 for download and 75 for upload. My current fibre-optic broadband delivers in excess of 60 *million* bits-per-second for downloads (fast enough for ultra high-definition video) and nearly 20 million for uploads. My Telecom Gold email system used to send each character I typed up to the server at 75 baud and didn't display it on my screen until it came back at 1200, which meant that I would often have typed a whole word before it even began to appear on my screen!

I was also reminded of my first ventures onto the Web, on behalf of BT CampusWorld, creating hyperlinked Web pages using Microsoft's *Word* word-processor – incredible.



I had a phone-call from Enterprise, the car hire company, telling me that they had been instructed by Aviva (my insurers, formerly the Norwich Union, who provided my Dad with his first and only mortgage in around 1959) to make a courtesy car available when ours goes in for repair. That sent me off to check if I had received an email from Aviva, which I had, assuring me that they would collect payment from the 'guilty' party's insurers. My excess and no-claims bonus would not be affected. Amazing – something in this world of collapsing services actually works! I just wait to be contacted by Aviva's appointed repairers now.

Walking around the house getting ready for lunch, the left foot wasn't totally pain-free, but still felt fairly good. I was planning to walk across to the pharmacy for prescriptions after lunch, which would give the HiTec shoes a bit of a test. I went over shortly after 2pm with very little discomfort, so it looks as if my walking shoes are actually going to *be* walking shoes from now on, instead of workout trainers which have been my standard casual footwear for years. The trainers I have been wearing as 'second best' are absolutely knackered, and I have one newer pair which I wear for 'best'. I guess either these or the HiTecs will have to be my everyday wear. If the former, I will need to buy another pair of Reeboks. Tomorrow's walk will be the real test, and if I decide that the HiTecs are to be my standard walking shoe I will have to visit The Original Factory Shop and see if they have any more on offer.

By 4:30pm I had been wearing the HiTecs for several hours and had spent most of that time sitting down. Every time I stood up I braced myself before putting weight on the left foot for the expected severe pain on top of the left instep and up the inside of the ankle. It didn't happen. Have I really been putting up with all this pain and worry just because my shoes are crap? I have even been rehearsing what I will say when I have my ankle assessment at the Royal Derby on the 4 September, now suddenly just a week and a half away.

After sitting for an hour or more the front of the left ankle was aching a little, so I loosened the shoelace which eased the discomfort.

Thanks to a surplus of wonderfully fresh eggs from our neighbours across the road, tonight's dinner is omelettes with leftover beans and hash browns from last night's fry-up.

When I was sitting up in bed reading, with my toes turned upwards, even the light weight of the summer quilt of our pure white goose down four-seasons duvet started aggravating the ache, but it soon faded when I lay down on my side.

## **Friday 25 August 2017**

Last night was a four-pee job, but I had no trouble getting straight back to sleep after each – even the last at about 6.30, when I saw that it was a beautiful sunny morning. Even that late I managed to get back to sleep and awoke to check my watch at exactly 7:10. I felt quite fresh and got up as soon as I had done my foot exercises and applied Murine eye drops, though I would have loved to go back to sleep again.

The morning was cool at around 13 degrees so I opted for the unzipped fleece again. The HiTec walking shoes felt comfortable when we started out, though there was a minor ache across the top of the left foot. It was only when we were more than half way round that the pain started to build up, and I was in real agony by the time I limped home. So much for my optimism yesterday. I don't know if I had laced the shoes too tightly or what, because when I put them on unlaced to go out to the garage I left them on as the foot felt quite good and it continued to do so.

There is a fairly hard ridge (not hard enough to be bone) across the front of what was once my ankle joint. It is sometimes very prominent and at other times less so, and this is where the ache seems to be concentrated, but the sharper pain is further down the foot, towards the summit of the instep which is really sharp.

Oh well – only ten days until I can discuss this with the orthopods in Derby on Monday week.

The disaster of the day was the failure of the upright freezer in the utility room. It had half defrosted before we discovered the problem. I got as much as possible of the contents into the garage chest freezer but it looked like a major challenge for the older appliance. I phoned Co-op Electrical from whom we bought the freezer just over a year ago (so no manufacturer's warranty) and discovered that I had bought a 3-year extended warranty. Unfortunately the policy is rather limited and we won't get an engineer here until the 5 September. Much of the food will be a write-off, but I think I have salvaged most of the meat and other higher-value stuff.

Later I sprayed all the weeds in the forecourt with RoundUp and then cut the grass. I needed a shower after this.

I had worked with the HiTecs quite loosely laced and the left foot stood up to the work very well.

### **Saturday 26 August 2017**

Today was a pretty average Saturday. We watched *Celebrity MasterChef*, recorded last night, instead of the much diminished *Saturday Kitchen Live*. This was better than we had expected, and we thoroughly enjoyed the whole 90-minute episode.

Before that, though, I finished the salvage operation following the freezer failure, getting as much stuff as possible into the garage chest freezer and a frightening quantity in the dustbin.

Later on Pat decided to join me in a quick shop at the Co-op. I had a short list of things we really needed and she wanted to find a few food-things to tempt Anton. We ended up filling three big shopping bags.

After a snack lunch I started watching the Belgian Grand Prix qualifying session, but my left foot started to hurt really badly. I tried massaging it and took two Paracetamol tablets, but it was when I got up and walked around that the excruciating pain faded rapidly away to nothing. This was amazing, but when I sat down to watch the rest of the qualifying it didn't come back again. The foot felt more-or-less fine for the rest of the afternoon. This really is very weird indeed. When the pain is bad, it really is very bad indeed, combining a general ache all around the ankle and heel and sharp, stabbing pain in the top of the instep. The foot felt like it did at the end of yesterday morning's walk, so at one time it is brought on by walking and at another it is cured by walking. Mad! I can't wait to talk to the orthopods on Monday week.

I went out to do a comprehensive search of the freezer contents I had transferred to the garage freezer and those I had consigned to the big, searching for a pack of Crispy Aromatic Duck which I was sure we had bought on our visit to Farm Foods and we planned to eat tonight. Not a sign. Quite a bit later I went out and repeated the search with no greater success. Pat thinks I said we shouldn't buy the duck but I don't remember that. I was convinced that I had seen it when I emptied the failed freezer, but I am beginning to think she is right! Oh well – we'll have to eat the rack of barbecued ribs which we definitely *did* buy...

The foot still felt fine after all this nonsense.

### **Monday 28 August 2017**

This thing with the left foot is really weird. On Friday morning walking brought the pain on to quite a high level of intensity and sitting still made it go away. Yesterday evening, sitting watching TV for too long without a break brought it on, again to a pretty severe level and then walking no further than to the bathroom made it go away again. There seems to be no logic to this at all. Over to the orthopods next Monday...

Sunday evening's dinner, prepared once the Belgian Grand Prix was over, was a roast chicken with new potatoes and frozen peas, followed by doubt chocolate coconut Magnums – a pleasant new experience.

This morning was quite warm – approaching 20 degrees – and beautifully sunny. We did the usual walk, which brought the left foot pain on relatively gently, so I got home with much less distress than on Friday.

Pat's weekly visit to Anton's was made much more pleasant by Alistair and the family (and dog) joining her there. Anton enjoyed seeing everybody and Alistair did a successful raid on his late grandfather's incredible collection of tools, so everyone was happy.

I did the full bed-change – fitted sheets, pillow-cases and duvet cover – and gave the bedroom carpet a good going-over with the Vax lightweight cleaner. That left me free to have a scavenge on Amazon Instant Video, and I chose *American Sniper*, a powerful portrayal of the Iraq war produced and directed by Clint Eastwood. That finished shortly before Pat got home in time for a light lunch. Then we had long chats with my daughter Sarah on the phone.

After tea and biscuits I remembered that one of the little worries I chose when nearly awake in the mornings was how to get to the stopcock under the bathroom floor now that we have our beautiful Karndean *Da Vinci* flooring, apparently glued firmly down. The installer did explain it before he left, but as we are coming up to boiler-service time I have been intending to check for some time. Armed with a carefully bent jumbo paperclip which I managed to thread between the laminate and the skirting board, I managed to hook one of the strips. It lifted fairly easily off the plywood underlay, bending obligingly back on itself. A scredriver gently inserted under the strips on either side, and those on either side of those, allowed them to curve up and expose the joints around a rectangle of ply, and a 50x10mm woodscrew driven into the ply provided a handle so that I could lift it out. Job done. Thus reassured, I put the ply back in and bent the strips of laminate back down. There was enough dry rubber adhesive on both surfaces to stick them down. Now I could book the boiler service.

On and off I have been trying to solve the 'wherewasi' puzzle in the Sunday Times, and failing. I usually manage these fairly easily but this week's is a real stinker. I have two more days to crack this one. Ironically one of the two answers is Lossiemouth, where Pat was born. But the other one...?

During the evening the left foot punished me again for sitting down too long.

## **Tuesday 29 August 2017**

Early this morning, after only one visit to the loo, I felt blissfully comfortable and relaxed. With the stopcock problem solved I didn't find anything to worry about and just enjoyed the good feeling. Eventually I picked up my watch and found that it was 6:55. I decided not to rush but to get downstairs just in time for the 7:30(ish) news summary. The feet were mildly painful when I started walking.

The morning was grey but warm at 17 degrees. I poured a cup of tea and left it to cool while I did my ablutions, and we left the house at 7:50, completing an uneventful walk in 34 minutes 44 seconds. The left foot had been niggly but not really painful.

Before lunch we went out and salvaged a lot of fallen apples and then picked what was ready and what we could reach from our tree. We ended up with about 20 pounds of fruit, some unblemished and some needing advanced surgery to get rid of the damage caused by moth larvae. We cooked a large pan to freeze for pies and crumbles, although the fruit is very sweet. We laboured our way through an apple each as part of our lunch, deciding that we needed to peel them as the skin really was too tough to chew. The flavour was superb, though.

Later still Sue came round with a bag of their home-grown Bramleys, for which I swapped a bag of ours.

Tonight we had a date with a pack of Sainsbury's top-of-the-range smoked salmon and very large helpings of Pat's amazing scrambled eggs – using eight of our neighbours' fresh ones, of course. A couple of slices of toast completed the course.

### **Wednesday 30 August 2017**

I got up at 7:10, dressed, went downstairs and had made a pot of tea by the time the 7:30 news bulletin came on. At that point it started to rain rather gently – 'spits and spots' as some of the BBC forecasters used to say. There wasn't really enough rain for the Gore-Tex cagoule, so with the temperature only 13 degrees I opted for my DuoFold fleece. I had cards to post, which meant a diversion of about 500 metres, so the walk took about 42 minutes (I forgot to stop the watch when we got home). Bailey needed a good towel-down – something he really loves – before being turned loose in the house.

The feet coped with the walk, though not without some twinges. By lunchtime they were feeling quite good.

Our new window-cleaners arrived this morning and we had asked them to do the inside of the conservatory, so the furniture and ornaments had to be reorganised to give them room and put back afterwards. The last guy – the Jehovah's Witness! - charged up £27 for the full job and told us he would be raising his price again. Luckily Sue was able to send her guys round to us. They did the whole job for £15 – their standard charge of a tenner and my offer for the conservatory.

Yet another Amazon delivery. 50 of the really excellent takeaway boxes I bought a few weeks ago for £6.29 – ten for 63p, compared with ten less robust boxes for a pound from Wilko. I honestly don't know how we managed without these boxes! And then four Oral-B electric toothbrush heads – the new 'flossing action' ones for £11.99, which I am sure is a lot cheaper than buying them from Boots. The range of stuff sold by or through Amazon really is extraordinary, and the value is amazing. With their Prime package (which also buys masses of free videos) almost everything is delivered within 24 hours of ordering, too.

I had another go at the *Sunday Times* puzzle, and eventually gave up. I submitted my answers anyway, and will be very interested to see what the right ones are on Sunday.

During the afternoon we processed the rest of the apples we collected from the garden and the tree yesterday, peeling them and cutting them into segments so that we could remove the grotty bits and then stewing them and boxing them for the freezer. This was a long and laborious job, but I am sure we will be rewarded by the pies and crumbles later in the year. Pat also processed the home-grown Bramleys which Sue brought round yesterday.

While clearing away, my feet gave me a fair amount of punishment.

Dinner tonight was wholegrain tagliatelle with red Pesto for Pat and Classic Pesto for me.

We had a reasonable amount of rain through the afternoon and evening, with a repeat performance forecast for tomorrow.

During the evening the left foot became very painful, and I got up to walk around and take two Paracetamol and half a 500mg Naproxen. Things had calmed down somewhat by bedtime but I still had trouble finding a comfortable position for the foot while reading in bed.

## Thursday 31 August 2017

I got up at 7:05. It was a lovely sunny morning with patchy cloud, but the temperature was only 10 degrees – Autumn beginning to get a grip? The feet felt more-or-less fine when I got up and I was maintaining a surprisingly lively pace in the early part of the walk. Halfway round the football-pitch the whole top of the left foot was really painful. With a credit balance from yesterday's extended walk, I decided to take the short route home, and was very relieved indeed to take my weight off the foot.

I took my dirty walking shoes off and used the old Reeboks, unlaced, as slippers, but before setting up for breakfast I abandoned the shoes and continued on (or 'in'?) stockinged feet. By the time breakfast was ready the foot was almost painless.

My first jobs after breakfast were to expose the stopcock and clear the decks around the boiler ready for its annual service. The engineer arrived on the stroke of 9 but it turned out that he didn't need the water turning off: the boiler has its own stopcock. Anyway, at least I know how to get to our now.

Before lunch, I did a quick emergency trip to the Co-op as we were running out of milk. Among other things I picked up a tub of their Creamy Coleslaw for tomorrow's dinner.

After lunch I decided to tackle the amazing number of windfall apples that were left under the tree. I planned to salvage any that might be worth it, but it turned out that they were all badly damaged, part eaten or rotten. Using our new lawn rake and old, heavy builder's shovel, I got them all into the builder's barrow, filling it almost to the brim, and from there into our two composters. After that I really needed a good shower, and dozed off in my chair once I had had a cup of tea.

I found the elusive crispy duck from Farm Foods in the garage freezer this morning and cooked it tonight. It was quite a lot better than the pork ribs but far from good enough for us to want it again. Disappointing. We'll try M&S next time. That's not to say Farm Foods has nothing to offer – we got some brilliant prices on good brands, including our regular Friday dessert: Magnums..

## Friday 1 September 2017

I was restless after a loo visit at around 5:30, trying to get back to sleep but failing, so I got up at 7:05 to see a beautiful still and sunny Autumn morning. My phone said the temperature was 12 degrees but the outside thermometer read 10. It didn't feel cold, though. The phone also said the sunshine should last at least until lunchtime.

We started out at a good pace with very little discomfort in the feet, but around the 20-minute mark, halfway round the football-pitch, the left foot started putting on a repeat performance of yesterday's walk. I was tempted to take the short cut again, but decided to tough it out and managed to get us home in just under 35 minutes, by which time I really was struggling with pain right across the top of the foot. It was a great relief to take the wet, grassy walking shoes off and sit down. By the time I had written the beginning of today's entry (above) the feet felt quite comfortable.

I did a poo patrol in the garden and gathered up the night's windfall apples, none of which were worth keeping, and then dislodged a few from the tree, which were. The feet were still happy in the old Reeboks, unlaced.

I then sent £600.46 to HMRC using my debit card online. This was tax unpaid from my 2014 Tax Return. It seems I had entered net earnings where I should have entered gross ones, with the result that I was charged less tax than I should have been. Some forlorn soul had been checking all this stuff after three years (or maybe a clever bit of software had) and discovered my honest error.

A slightly more pleasant financial task was to send £40 to Alistair via PayPal (a truly wonderful tool!) - £5 a week pocket-money each for Ewan and Tom through the month.

Pat was outside gardening and at around midday I went out to join her and mix some plant food to give some of the potted plants a boost.

After some really depressing encounters with oven chips and wedges (the ones from Farm Foods were very disappointing, as were Aunt Bessie's chips) I decided on home-made wedges with Sainsburys' chicken wings and Co-op coleslaw this evening, followed by *real* Magnums bought from Farm Foods and actually costing *less* than Aldi's own-brand equivalents. I parboiled the wedges, putting them straight into boiling water as I do for roasties, let them steam and cool a little then rolled them in olive oil before sprinkling with salt and pepper and baking. Starting the parboil in boiling water softens the outside of the potato without cooking it through, my own invention to ensure that it absorbs some oil.

### **Saturday 2 September 2017**

We watched the first episode of James Martin's new Saturday show on ITV this morning. It was a bit chaotic and showed how effective the BBC programme was, with good scripting and an autocue allowing James to seem natural and spontaneous. He's not the best ad-libber!

After that we went over to Buxton and took Alistair and the gang out for lunch at my old favourite pub, the Cheshire Cheese, again and went back to theirs for a cup of coffee before driving home again. It was great to see Alistair returned to his old self. It's amazing what surgery to a tiny gland can do to change your life.

Our poor neglected dog went absolutely crazy when we got home. Sadly he will be deserted again for a big chunk of Monday because of my ankle review in Derby.

We watched an amazing F1 qualifying session from a rain-drenched Monza when we got back, but were too weary to watch *Inspector Montalbano* all the way through. That remains to be finished tomorrow morning, with the Grand Prix in the early evening.

### **Sunday 3 September 2017**

I went up to the Co-op before a late breakfast, and was concerned at the car's strange behaviour when I tried to start it. It refused to catch on the first couple of tries and didn't feel quite right. Something odd had happened when I stalled it at a junction on the trip to Buxton yesterday, perhaps turning the key while in gear and with the clutch engaged.

After failing to decide what to do for Sunday dinner, we agreed to have a 'supper' of baked beans on toast with fried eggs (of which we still have a plethora!). We slotted this in neatly between the few TV programmes we wanted to watch, in a one-hour slot following a documentary about Diana's involvement with Wales, where he was even more adored than in England, and the Italian Grand Prix highlights. After his brilliant qualifying, Lewis didn't disappoint, holding first place from start to finish and with a rather lacklustre Vettel in third behind Bottas. That took him into a fragile lead in the World Championship.

### **Monday 4 September 2017**

After a restless night (though with only two pees!) worrying about the starting problem I had with the car yesterday and its implications for today's drive to Anton's and then on to Derby for my hospital appointment, I got up at 7:05 feeling pretty weary. I decided to do the run to Anton's and see how the car goes. So I rang the hospital softly after 9am and recorded a message asking for a new appointment. This

will have the added benefit of not putting poor Bailey through three long days alone with only one normal one between them.

We had discussed strategies for walking Bailey in term time, avoiding all the kids on bikes and scooters and I decided to revert to the lane route. This would have the added benefit of keeping my shoes out of the mud, which builds up badly in the deep HiTec treads.

It took 16¾minutes to get to the first field gate, my regular 15-minute mark, and 33 minutes 37 seconds to complete what was once my half-hour walk. However, the feet felt good and I kept up a brisk pace without difficulty. There was no sign of school-kids so the Autumn term must start tomorrow. I checked on the Web and it turns out that they don't start until Wednesday.

I went over to Anton's with Pat, mainly to check the car – which was fine – but also to check a document which his carers had asked Pat to persuade him to sign. It turned out that we weren't sure he should sign, even if we could convince him to. His care package is completely up the pole.

Later, I fed the yeast ferment and left it to reactivate, and when it was good and bubbly I returned it to its takeaway box and put it in the fridge ready for the next bake. This will be a while because there are quite a few rolls in the freezer which seem to have survived The Great Freezer Disaster.

During the evening, watching TV, the left foot became very painful on top, and I needed to get up and walk around to ease it several times.

## **Tuesday 5 September 2017**

I got up at 7:05 after a reasonable sleep in spite of a lot of bladder activity. The feet felt quite good when I got out of bed.

There was rain on the windows but nothing seemed to be falling when I got downstairs. We repeated yesterday's route to the old 15-minute mark on the lane and back again but took a minute and a half longer than yesterday, finishing in 35 minutes 9 seconds. The rain did start again at about the halfway mark, but not enough to get us really wet – fortunate, as I had opted for my fleece, which is only *fairly* water-resistant, rather than the cagoule. We passed Heidi the Weimeraner, who was fairly hostile yesterday morning so we gave her a wide berth. There was another encounter, with a nice friendly dog led by a lady who looked familiar but whom I could not place.

I wasn't hampered during the walk by foot pain, which was quite a novelty, and a surprise after last night.

This route has the great advantage of good long sightlines, unlike the football-pitch one which has me pulling Bailey in to check around bends for possible difficult encounters. It is also asphalt all the way, prone to puddles and sometimes given a generous coating of mud by the farmer's tractor but usually easy to negotiate without getting too messy. It does go underwater completely in places when the rain is heavy, but this doesn't happen too often. There were puddles this morning, but only little ones. The football-pitch is fine in warm, dry weather.

There was rather a lot of water appearing from under the washer, so I went out to investigate the drain under the utility-room window. I tidied the pebble which were supposed to stop gravel and sand getting down, and will have to watch it when the machine does its next spin cycle.

A little before midday Pat realised she hadn't sent a birthday card to Barney's Mum Nicky for tomorrow, so Bailey and I had a little jaunt up to the nearest postbox, about seven or eight minutes away. I decided to try him on collar and lead rather than the

usual anti-pull harness, and he did really well, just tugging quite gently. The morning walk of around half an hour on the extending lead on just the collar might be a bit more of a challenge, so I think we will stick to the harness for that one.

The feet were quite comfortable on this short extra walk and were feeling fairly good right through the morning. Sometime after 1pm, though, we sat down for a cup of tea and a bite to eat, and within minutes the top of the left foot was hurting quite badly. Getting up and walking soon stopped that, and sitting on my lovely new office chair with my feet tucked underneath didn't seem to aggravate things. There seems to be no logic to this. And it is very inconvenient for watching TV!

The freezer engineer finally arrived early in the afternoon, 12 days after I reported the fault under the 3-year extended warranty I bought with the freezer. He gave the appliance a thorough going-over. He could not identify one single cause of the failure and ordered a whole lot of parts online which would be tried one at a time. The bad news was that some of them would not be delivered for over two weeks. By this time I had had it switched on for most of the day and the temperature had dropped quite low so it should be possible to use it provided I keep watch on the temperature, which was down to -23degC by 5:30. I decided to postpone moving any food back into it until tomorrow, just in case, although I did drop the half-used bag of petits pois in rather than hike all the way out to the garage. I emailed Co-op Electrical and suggested that they should replace the freezer immediately as they could not repair it within a reasonable time limit. I didn't mention the fact that it was probably going to work acceptably!

The left foot has been erratic today but not very painful until the long evening sit-down, when it played its usual tricks, forcing me to take a short walk up and down the room during commercial breaks. Then I made a discovery: if I sat well forward on the chair, so that my lower legs were vertical, the pain eased. If I leaned my elbows on my knees this was fairly comfortable position. Then I tried leaning back and sliding my bum further forward – more comfortable, just as much relief and less disturbance of the viewing.

All this was logical, considering that the foot is always comfortable when sitting on the office chair, but the penny had taken a while to drop. I must research gout...

I decided to leave the low-energy hall lights (two at eight watts) on all night for Bailey's benefit.

### **Wednesday 6 September 2017**

The foot was a bit sore when I got up at 7:05 after only two visits to the loo. It calmed down with walking around the house. It had rained quite a bit through the night but had stopped before I got up. The forecast was for light cloud, with mention of rain, so I opted for the fleece again.

Today is the first day of term, so I would be on the lookout for primary-school kids with their scooters and bikes, which Bailey finds dangerously exciting. I saw a few secondary kids on the out leg.

By the time we reached the lane the left foot was getting very painful – really sharp pain down the top of the foot to the big toe – so I decided to cut the walk short and turn round after 15 minutes. Just to tease me, the pain decided to ease on the home leg! The total time was 31 minutes 31 seconds.

When we turned into our street I was relieved to see no kids at all. Part way along we saw one young woman with two little ones on the other side of the road, and exchange 'good morning' greetings, but that was it. Once we were at the front door, with the gate safely closed, a few more walked past and Bailey was quite excited by their noise.



After breakfast Pat and I discussed what we would want to eat over the next few days. Then I went into town and walked the 500 metres up through the market to Darren's stall and bought four lots of fish. Then to Sainsbury's with a fairly modest list which seemed to take a very long time to deal with. Once we had packed everything away we sat down with coffee and biscuits, and my left foot started to play up. My new little tricks didn't work as well as they did yesterday evening, but when I went upstairs to change the pain went away almost instantly. However, I had a sharp pain in my *right* big toe which brought back my suspicions about gout. I guess it will make sense to wait until I have seen the orthopods in just under three weeks before seeing a GP (a good trick if you can do it these days!). The left foot pain also came back as soon as I sat down.

After lunch I went out to bring in the recycling wheelie-bin and then decided to do the car's tyre pressures. Finally, I got round to moving most of the food out of the garage chest freezer and into the dodgy kitchen one. Quite a few more items got diverted to the landfill bit on the way but at least the surviving stuff in the kitchen freezer is organised in the drawers.

After all that the left foot feels pretty good, and felt fine sitting on the office chair, but I was dreading sitting in my recliner with my 4pm cup of tea! In the end, though, my new leg-management plan worked and I was able to drink my tea and watch TV later with very little trouble.

For dinner I did grilled lemon sole fillets with sauté potatoes and petits pois, finishing off Pat's delicious apple crumble and my equally delicious custard.

### **Thursday 7 September 2017**

I had a decent night with only two interruptions from the bladder, the first between 2 and 3am and the second after 6. At 7 o'clock, after a nice lazy lounge, I was getting ready for another one, so I got up. The huge variation between the inter-pee intervals is really weird, although I do know that lying face-down puts pressure on my bladder even when it is far from full.

With the temperature at 12 degrees and a dull sky but no sign of rain, the morning looked promising. We were ready for our walk by 7:35, when the news summary was over, and by then the solid cloud was retreating towards the East Coast, leaving high cirrus ('mackerel') behind. The left foot felt better than yesterday but was still fairly painful. However, I managed to get to the first field gate (the '15-minute mark') and home again, with two painless doggy encounters, in 35 minutes 28 seconds, just a little slower than on Monday and Tuesday. By the time I had been sitting on the office chair for 10 minutes the pain had more-or-less gone.

I did a poo patrol and windfall hunt after breakfast, and then it was coffee time.

Pat got to grips with shrubs in the garden and generated two decent piles of clippings, so when she stopped I added these to the load already in the big builder's bag and dragged it to the side gate, ready to take to the tip in the morning.

I floured and fried the two halves of a lovely thick tail fillet of salmon bought from Darren on Wednesday and served them with new potatoes and petits pois. I made an executive decision that because of freezer problems I would over-rule the only-Magnums-on-Friday conventions for dessert.

I was reasonably comfortable sitting through the evening, but I couldn't get the left foot comfortable when I was sitting up to read. I even took two Paracetamols before turning out the light.

## Friday 8 September 2017

I had a pretty disastrous morning. First, after getting up at 7:05, I forgot to weigh myself as I normally do on Friday. When we set off at 7:32, with rain just spotting the paving outside, I forgot to start the stopwatch. Then the left foot started to hurt before we had even got to the end of our road, about 3 minutes into the walk, and by the time we had negotiated the main Doncaster road and started down the steepest hill on the lane route, it was really painful. At the bottom I decided to abort the walk and went up the slightly gentler hill on the opposite side of the green. I was very relieved indeed to get home in a total time of around 20 minutes.

My planned trip to the tip was looking a bit unlikely, but maybe the foot would calm down as quickly as the pain started. Perhaps I had laced my walking shoes too tightly. The pain had certainly eased after 20 minutes or so in socks and on the lovely office chair.

It was also looking unlikely by the time we had had breakfast because the forecast heavy rain had arrived with a vengeance – the phrase 'raining stair-rods' was the most accurate description. I therefore settled down to processing a very big batch of our own apples, peeling, slicing and coring each and cutting out all the bruises and tracks left by winter or codling moths. I then cooked the fruit in water with the added juice of a lemon.

To my surprise, by lunchtime the builder's bag of garden refuse was completely dry, benefiting from being tucked away between our house and next door, and perhaps from the fact that the rain had given way to bright Autumn sunshine. So I loaded the bag, which was more bulky than heavy, into the back of the Focus and took it down to the tip.

One day last week I adjusted the tyre pressures with the digital pump, and the car felt both fast and agile – really sporty. The Focus really is a worthy successor to the amazing Escort – I would love an ST! I really must get into the habit of doing the pressures every week. I drove in the HiTec walking shoes and they were really comfortable, with good feel.

I had a phone call confirming that our replacement freezer would definitely be delivered on Monday. Although ours is a Hotpoint and the new one is an Indesit, I'm pretty sure they are identical – even the spares the engineer tried to order were from Indesit. The old one is working fine – as a freezer – but the fan that ensures freedom from frost and the display are dead. Our freezer cost £299 and the new one, only a year-and-a-half later is priced at about £475. The extended warranty which is paying for the replacement only cost £27, so the whole deal looks pretty good. I must buy another warranty!

After the chaos of sorting out the foods that survives the defrost and those that didn't, and transferring each item to either the garage freezer or the wheelie-bin, I have a better plan: on Sunday I will transfer the contents of each freezer drawer into one or two carrier-bags and put these in the garage freezer. Then, when the new freezer has had its settling-in time and is cold enough, it will be a doddle to load it.

Dinner tonight was a minor disaster. We decided to try the small pack of crispy duck from Sainsbury's. The cucumber was soggy and the spring onions were too fibrous to cut into julienne. The duck wasn't crispy because there was no skin – it was all pre-shredded meat. Admittedly the hoi sin sauce wasn't bad and the pancakes were okay, but the whole experience was disappointing. The only thing we had handy was a Co-op Cheesy Feast pizza, and that was less than thrilling as well. Neither of us was really hungry, so we settled for a Magnum each. I hope our more ambitious plans for the weekend will be more rewarding!

The wretched left foot continued to protest at me sitting still, and in spite of me sitting with the leg in what has usually been a comfortable position it got really painful before I got up and had a walk round. Then, just to be cantankerous, it didn't hurt at all for the rest of the evening!

### **Saturday 9 September 2017**

I managed to stay comfortably tucked up in bed until after 8:30 this morning and the foot behaved fairly well. We watched James Martin's new programme, and with his Yorkshire hero Brian Turner on the team it was pretty entertaining. James does talk some awful nonsense though. The programme lasted for two hours without aggravating the left foot, which continued to behave when I put the HiTec walking shoes on and went up to the Co-op. These seem to be walking-in nicely now: they feel soft and flexible for walking and driving.

We finally managed to contact a builder who was prepared to repair the water-leak in our conservatory, and he visited this afternoon, recommended what should be done and quoted what seemed a very reasonable price of £420. Moreover, he is free to start on Monday, before he has another bigger job to go to. He said he would email his quote.

Pat and I spent quite a while in the kitchen together, she cooking minced beef and onions for cottage pies and me producing nearly two kilos of mashed potatoes to top her pies and for bangers, mash and beans this evening, using some interesting looking Toulouse-style sausages from Sainsbury's, hoping they would be better than their alleged crispy duck. As it turned out, they weren't: they shrank dramatically when grilled and ended up rather dry and short of flavour. Fortunately, the mash, baked beans and my onion gravy (built around the leftover juice from Pat's mince), with a generous shot of HP Sauce, made up for them.

I was a little concerned that the promised email from the builder didn't arrive before I shut down the computer.

### **Sunday 10 September 2017**

Typing that heading reminded me that today is my Dad's birthday. He would have been 106, but sadly died in his 80s.

I walked up to the shop for the usual *Sunday Times* and cigarettes and milk for Anton. This is only a three-minute walk each way, but when I started walking back my left foot was hurting badly. It settled quickly once I was home, but it is worrying that it became so painful after so little walking.

The email from the builder arrived in the mid-morning, after I had changed our beds, vacuuming the mattresses when they were stripped, and vacuumed the rest of the bedroom and the en-suite, followed by a shower. I emailed my acceptance back and set about clearing the decks for him. Our conservatory is full of all sorts of ornaments, so I needed to move these. First, though, I needed to get the huge antique oak dining table through the double doors into the sitting-room to give me somewhere to put all the nick-knacks. Then there was a lot of summer stuff such as cushions for patio chairs that needed taking down to the summer house. That meant clearing space in the summer house, as did the old-fashioned teacher's chair which needed to go down there too. I managed all this and got down to stashing all the bits and pieces, eventually leaving nothing but a heavy pine coffee table and a wicker one, plus a tall chest of drawers used by Pat for her sewing stuff. These, plus two stereo speakers which live under our wicker chairs, were arranged in the corner furthest from the building work and covered with a dustsheet. Job done, but I wished I had saved my shower for after all this stuff!

After a bad start with the left foot I was relieved that it felt fine (well, almost!) after what must have been my busiest Sunday morning for months. It did begin to hurt when I had spent quite a long time reading *The Observer* on the Kindle, but careful adjustment of the foot's position controlled it. It was niggly through the evening but nothing I couldn't handle.

### **Monday 11 September 2017**

I got up at 4am and again at 6:30 to see rain all over the en-suite window, but when I got up for keeps at 7 o'clock it had stopped and the sky was brightening. My right knee had been aching in bed, and both legs felt somewhat the worse for yesterday's exertions.

Mark the builder was due between 8:30 and 9am, so I decided to do a fairly short walk (in a sweatshirt and cagoule, just in case). By the five-minute mark the left foot was really sore, and it got progressively worse as we got round the short circuit in 21 minutes 23 seconds. It didn't rain much while we were out but really got going after breakfast.

Mark arrived shortly after 9am and decided to start on the inside work in the hope that the rain would stop, as forecast, at around lunchtime. It did, in the end, and he was finished by not long after 2pm, by which time I had been to the Co-op to use the ATM for his cash payment.

While Pat was at Anton's, I watched the final episode of *Game of Thrones Series 6* to get my bearings and then the first part of *Season 7*. It was looking good...

Then the freezer arrived. As the official replacement for our old one it was a rotten match, being about 150mm taller. I had to saw the end off a shelf to accommodate it. I also had to take the cover off the unused burglar alarm control board which restricted the width of the recess where the old freezer had been perfectly snug. Then, having wrestled the beast into place against the resistance of the changes in flooring material (it has one pair of wheels and one of little feet), I had to get it out again to find the serial number so I could buy an extended warranty – not something I would neglect ever again! Even lying on the floor, the space was so confined and my eyesight so bad that I had to ask Pat to find my phone and slide it past the freezer so I could photograph the sticker on the compressor housing! This worked a treat, giving me a clear shot of the number. After that it was time to fire the thing up. It has a nice LED display, much better than the one on the old freezer, which dies long before the appliance itself, with a row on control buttons. So by 5pm the thing was cooling towards its target temperature of -18degC – and I was totally knackered.

Interestingly, once again all the exertion had left my silly left foot quite comfortable.

By late afternoon, Pat had put most of the stuff back in the conservatory but leaving it so that we will be able to pain the inside. By 6:45pm the new freezer was down to -4degC according to my trusty digital probe thermometer whose probe I had left in the centre drawer. By bedtime it was down to -14.

Luckily we had left-over cottage pie and beans from last night, plus strawberry cream sponge for afters, so dinner was easy.

### **Tuesday 12 September 2017**

I had a rather restless night, though with only two trips to the loo, and when I looked at my watch it was exactly 7am. The morning was bright and sunny and my feet didn't feel too bad, though both legs were tired. The freezer was down to -17 degrees, so I would be able to put the stuff back today.

I decided to take yesterday's short route again, and by the time we were halfway round the left foot was, if anything, more painful than yesterday. I had a real struggle

getting us home in around 20 minutes. By the end of breakfast the pain had eased, and by 9:30, wearing the disgusting old Reeboks – unlaced – I had moved the bags of food from the garage freezer to the new ones without much pain.

I had to chase the car repairers and the car hire company before I could get a clear plan for the arrival of the courtesy car and the collection of our car for repairs. This was complicated by the fact that we have to be at Anton's tomorrow because the email I sent to one of his three local city councillors has borne fruit and various officials want us to meet with them there. I got the arrangements sorted out eventually – a lot of faffing around for a small dent and scratch!

I also had to put a wire above one of the kitchen windows to support a long runner from the rose by the back door. This proved a challenge because both the bricks and the mortar resisted almost all my attempts to drill and plug them for screws. I managed in the end.

I was busy on and off through the day without the foot giving me much grief, but both legs and feet just felt sore and weary, especially after drilling while up the ladder! The left foot behaved better than it has recently when sitting down through the evening: I didn't need to keep getting up to ease it.

### **Wednesday 13 September 2017**

The forecast high winds were getting into their stride by the time we went to bed, and in the small hours (it turned out to be 3:55am) we were wakened by the sound of a huge squall and a crash in the bedroom. I checked the en-suite window and found that it wasn't fully latched I assumed, in my groggy state, that that was what had made the noise, but when I got up at 7:05am I found that the bedroom door was fully closed. We always leave it ajar because I like to be able to hear anything that might be happening around the house, so the door had to be the origin of the crash.

I was tempted to use the lost sleep and my general physical tiredness as an excuse for not getting up at my normal time and not walking, but the bladder and bowels made this a no-no.

My legs and feet were still feeling fairly weary when I got downstairs, but I managed the usual routine – and this week's usual shortened route. Just when I was relaxing my vigilance, Stanley, Louisa and their owner appeared round a corner just a few metres ahead of us on the way home. Bailey and Stanley both went totally berserk, but we managed to keep them far enough apart for us to continue the walk.

The left foot felt better than on either Monday or Tuesday and we walked noticeably faster on the way home.

When I got home I realised that I hadn't restarted the watch after the second poo, so I guessed at a time shorter than yesterday's and Monday's: 18 minutes.

I did a temporary security job on our side gate (actually an ordinary wooden door), because the silly little brass bolt was broken and the gate is not lockable. I screwed a fairly robust piece of wood across between the door and the frame. Then I got onto Amazon and ordered two more robust bolts to be delivered tomorrow – it just isn't worth getting in the car to visit Wickes or B&Q.

We had a disappointing meeting at Anton's. It left Pat really upset and she didn't really recover for the rest of the day.

The courtesy car was delivered late in the afternoon: a beautiful 2016 VW Gold GTD estate with scary brakes that really snatch at the lightest touch of the pedal. The Enterprise guy had parked it outside and I decided to try to back it in through our gate, but there wasn't room to get past our car. So I took the Golf for a spin round the estate opposite so as to approach our entrance on the opposite side of the road. It

was a beautiful drive apart from the brakes. I managed to get it past out car which was parked ready for the repair people to drive out.

### **Thursday 14 September 2017**

I was awake early for my second loo visit of the night and napped fitfully until 7 o'clock.

It was a pleasant morning, but with no low sun to contend with. My preparations for the walk were interrupted by some idiot calling the pub that used to have our number about ten years ago. I was very rude, because I didn't want Pat wakened. We did the same route as for the rest of the week, but I reversed the direction just for a bit of variety. The feet felt reasonable, if not exactly comfortable, and we got round in just over 18½ minutes. Pat was up, having been worried about the phone-call being important, and had everything set for breakfast.

After eating and a sit-down for two cups of tea my legs and feet had really stiffened. I walked down to the shed to get some of my marmalade for Pat to take to Sue's this afternoon, which loosened them up a bit.

Later in the morning Pat went down to Sue's for a long drawn-out coffee, which gave me space to watch no less than three episodes of *Game of Thrones* season 7. It really is very good. Then the afternoon was devoted largely to waiting for the car to be collected for its repairs.

After dinner, sitting over a cup of tea, the left foot began its old antics again with a sharp ache across the top of the instep. I had a little walk around the house and then went out to shut the front gates – enough exercise to cure the pain, at least temporarily, but it kept coming back throughout the evening.

We had a worry at bedtime when Pat took her glucose reading, which had been worryingly high at breakfast and was now equally worryingly low. She had run out of glucose tablets, so she had a cup of chocolate with a fair amount of sugar built-in. The late reading used her last glucose strip, so I did a fast Amazon Prime job on my phone and ordered a fresh box. Once in bed I struggled to sit up without aggravating the pain, trying many different positions, but it didn't subside until I lay down.

### **Friday 15 September 2017**

I had a decent night's sleep, with three visits to the loo, and decided to get up a little early – 6:55am. It was a dull, still morning with a temperature of about 10 degrees.

The bathroom scales seemed to have vanished in the disruption caused by the freezer delivery so I was unable to weigh myself yet again.

My feet didn't feel too bad once I was up, aching but mildly. I decided to skip the 7:30 news summary and get back in time for the full 7 o'clock bulletin. The walk was uneventful apart from an amicable meeting with a big hairy Alsatian – amicable at least until Bailey decided to jump up, presumably playfully, but that is how he got attacked by the Rottweiler in Buxton. Rather than do the full circuit, I decided to turn back after 10 minutes, and we finished in just over 20, by which time my left foot really was painful. It soon calmed down after some time spent sitting at the computer.

Once I was up and about, though, I was painfully aware of how stiff and weary my legs are getting. I started wondering whether I would be able to keep up the morning walks much longer, which was really depressing. I started my daily walking programme in Summer 2009, the day after I was warned that I was borderline for Type 2 Diabetes, and I have kept up a strict routine every since. I hate to think what the effects would be if I stopped. And now that we have Bailey I feel an obligation to walk him regularly too. Maybe my ankle review next week will come up with something helpful, even if the problems aren't ankle-related.

Towards the end of the morning I decided to do some of the filling between the skirting board and the wall in the conservatory because we intend to do some re-painting after the roof repairs and the heat had shrunk the wood considerably leaving quite a gap. Sitting on the floor was a less-than-ideal position for my stiff old bones, and among other problems I was getting cramp in my right hip area. I finished a run of skirting before deciding that lunch would be more restful.

By evening the left foot was feeling a lot more comfortable than it did last night, when I had to keep getting up and walking around to relieve the pain. Tonight I was reasonably careful to control the position of the foot while I was sitting, but there was no real pain at all. Having said that, when I got up after sitting continuously for a couple of hours the feet felt quite rocky for a few minutes.

I had an idea when getting dressed this morning. I have been wearing the compression socks for quite a while, and it occurred to me that pulling them up very tight might be compressing my big toes. So this morning I made a point of leaving a little slack in the toe end of each sock, and my big toes have been far less painful all day.

Sitting down after lunch soon started the left foot niggling again. I decided to stretch it with a walk to the shops for some urgently needed milk. The foot coped, but walking was still a little painful. Sitting all evening, however, was quite comfortable, but the left foot was difficult to settle once I was sitting up in bed.

Our courtesy car arrived later: a very nice if rather confusing VW Golf GTD estate. Confusing because of keyless everything and a silly little electric 'handbrake'. I had to drive it round the block so as to fit it onto the forecourt with room for ours to be collected, which happened later. Lots of power and very smooth, but too many gadgets for my taste.

## **Monday 18 September 2017**

An exciting grand prix weekend kept me glued to my chair for quite a few hours on Saturday and Sunday. The high spot was Vettel's bit of wild aggression that took not just him and Raikkonen but also poor Max Verstappen out of the race a few seconds from the start. This left Lewis ample space to move up from his fifth place on the grid to the lead, from which he drove a serene race in spite of the wet track and leaving him a comfortable lead in the World's Championship. So a great day for me, just when I had started to get a bit bored with F1.

Bailey and I had a nice 18¼ minute walk without incident in very pleasant conditions.

I was a bit anxious about the VW, and when I went out for a trial start I couldn't get the start-stop button to work. I phoned Enterprise and googled, and eventually found out how it all worked: fully depress the clutch pedal and press the button!

We set out early for Anton's and I discovered another trick: the engine stops when you stop the car at traffic lights, and starts again when you depress the clutch. Too gadgety for me.

We didn't stay very long at Anton's because he got rather unpleasant last week, blaming Pat for phoning to invite all sorts of people into his house. We met with another council official and reassured ourselves that his gas and electricity systems would be thoroughly checked, and then left to do a big shop in Morrison's followed by a superb fish-and-chip lunch at Whitby's.

We didn't need any dinner.

Late in the evening Bailey got aggressive with Pat – totally out of character for him – and really frightened her. He had been trying to climb on top of her and when she

pushed him off he snarled and snapped, as well as scratching her arm with his claws, We will need to watch him very closely.

## **Tuesday 19 September 2017**

This morning's early walk after I had a restless hour to two was difficult with the very low and bright sun. We were back in plenty of time for the 8 o'clock news with the watch showing 24½ minutes, having turned round at 12½ .

After breakfast I went up to put the fresh fitted sheets and pillow-cases on our beds. Once or twice I have forgotten this job, which is a real wrestle, until bedtime and that is a real horror! Once I had worked up a nice sweat I showered, shaved and got dressed semi-respectably for the Speed Awareness Course in Chesterfield – a good, if tedious, alternative to a £100 fine and three penalty points. This is my second one, the previous one being over 10 years ago, so I didn't expect any startling revelations.

It was worrying irrationally about having to drive 'all the way' to Chesterfield in an unfamiliar car that contributed to the general anxiety I suffered between around 5:30 and 7 o'clock – silly! I also knew that I needed to put fuel in the car but didn't know how to open the filler, so I went out and discovered that the filler cover emitted a loud click when I unlocked the car – as any sensible person would expect!

I left a little before 11am, feeling more confident behind the wheel, and stopped at Sainsbury's for ten litres of diesel. The drive to the Tesco roundabout on the A61 Chesterfield by-pass went quickly and smoothly. I prefer this junction to the one further north, which we frequently use going to and from Buxton, because it has a good traffic-light system whereas the other one has none and you have to compete with traffic coming from all directions. The hotel is enormous, so I had no difficulty finding my way into the car park, although empty spaces were few and far between.

I had time for a coffee, so I went into the bar and had a cappuccino and a read of my Le Carré book on the phone's Kindle app. Then up to the sixth floor to join my fellow speed-freaks. I had to prove my identity with photo ID, and was surprised to discover that the portrait on my card driving licence had faded badly. It was accepted, though, and the day went very well. The two presenters were friendly and amusing and the course was well structured, encouraging discussion and banter among my fellow miscreants. It was intense, though, and I was glad to escape at 4:30, without having been let down by my bloody bladder, which had been another worry. The beginning of the drive home in the Chesterfield rush hour was frustratingly stop-start, but the traffic soon dispersed and the rest of the drive was a pleasure (I had managed to find Radio 4 on the touchscreen eventually).

It was nice to come home to a meal cooked by Patricia: fried salmon fillets with new potatoes and broad beans from our neighbours' garden. My feet had caused me no trouble through the day, but the left one was mildly painful while sitting in front of the TV and sitting up in bed.

## **Wednesday 20 September 2017**

I was a pleasant morning when I got up at 6:55, barely up to 10 degrees but thankfully without the low sun of yesterday. My feet felt quite good, and continued to do (apart from a feeling of bruised soles) so as we did the same short route as yesterday, turning round at the 12½-minute mark. We met a big, boisterous Alsatian and we owners only managed with difficulty to get the dogs apart from what I am sure was just a play-fight. We finished the circuit in 25 minutes 18 seconds.

Towards the end of the morning, I drove Pat to the hospital for a blood test asked for by the GP, and on the way back we stopped off at the Co-op for urgently needed dog biscuits and a few other items. As is happening quite a lot lately, we decided to skip lunch, just having a rather late morning coffee with the usual Lotus biscuit. Later on I



decided that, as the sun had shone for most of the morning, the grass should be dry enough to cut the grass, which had really shot up in the last week or so. Assisted by Bailey, I heaved the mighty Atco round, and was amazed at the amount of grass I had to dump in the composters: three very full and barely liftable Atco bags. While out I noticed that the level had dropped quite seriously in the pond and set the hose to top it up.

We watched two episodes of *Rizzoli and Isles* before Pat retired to the kitchen to do Mary Berry's Malaysian chicken fried rice, which was delicious.

Unsurprisingly after mowing, the left foot was rather uncomfortable while sitting this evening, and – again – difficult to get settled while reading in bed.

### **Thursday 21 September 2017**

Once I got my head down and the leg carefully placed, I had a good night's sleep with only one visit to the loo (one night this week I had to go *five* times) until an urgent one at 6:45, after which I decided to put my eye drops in and get up. It was dull and windless but very mild (between 16 and 18 degrees, depending on which phone app I consulted, with just a hint of fine drizzle in the air.

The feet were quite sore when I got up, but by the time we were ready to go out they had settled down and I had what was probably the most painless walk I have had in weeks, completing the usual route in 25½ minutes. We managed to ignore the blasted corgis down the road and had brief and friendly encounter with an old greyhound just after that. I was impressed with Bailey: my shoelace had come loose on the footpath and I had to put the handle of the lead down while I re-tied it. He didn't move a step. I hope I will be able to go back to 30 minutes next week – if the orthopods don't order total rest!

With no creaking from our bedroom floorboards after writing the above, I decided I could best use my time doing a full set of my neck, shoulder and back exercises, which I had only done once recently. Bailey was very thoughtful and didn't join me on the floor until I had just finished.

Pat had decided to do some essential garden maintenance and ended up with a huge pile of Lucifer stems on the lawn, which I had to split between two big builder's bags. It got these under cover on the summer-house veranda before the rain arrived and will get them to the tip as soon as possible.

I had a number of phone conversations because the accident repair people were under the impression that I would pay my £350 excess to them. I was sure I had had an email from Aviva, my insurers, which said the excess would be waived as the accident was entirely due to someone else's rubbish driving. My rule of never deleting emails that might possibly be needed, erring on the side of caution, because an *Outlook* search quickly found the right one. Everyone was pleasant and helpful on the phone and the error was quickly corrected. Phew!

The car came home from the repairers at around 4pm and I called Enterprise to get the VW collected, which might happen tonight or tomorrow morning. It will be a great relief to be driving a familiar car and one that doesn't try to do your thinking for you!

The left foot felt a little better through the evening than it has recently, and was also less of a hindrance to reading in bed.

### **Friday 22 September 2017**

I had a good night's sleep, perhaps facilitated by doing my exercises, despite four visits to the loo – it was two last night and the night before but five the night before that. The last visit was at 6:10, and I managed to stay in bed until 6:50, when I got

up. It was a glorious Autumn morning, but by far the coldest we have had at 6 degrees.

I actually managed to do my Friday weigh-in at last. I felt fairly optimistic and was rewarded with a loss of 1¼ pounds. I put this down to a general loss of interest in food, with many weekday lunches skipped.

The foot felt reasonable, apart from an ache and slight tenderness in the heel, when we set out into the eyeball-searing low sun, and was only mildly painful by the time we got back in 25½ minutes.

As part of my admin routine I filled in the spreadsheet from my grotty hand-written paper log of nocturnal pees, which doesn't show much change – just random fluctuations between two and five a night. I think I might keep the paper log going but not bother with *Excel* any more.

At 9:15 I was still waiting for Enterprise to remove the VW. I want to do a bit of shopping but I think I had better be here for the collection after yesterday's confusion over the excess.

At 18:15 I was *still* waiting, and thinking of charging them a parking fee!

I went to Sainsbury's earlier – in *our* car – and stocked up for tonight's wings-and-wedges dinner, with only mild protests from my aching feet. I also went out and shovelled up the remaining windfall apples and tried to get the last survivors off the tree.

## **Monday 25 September 2017**

Our weekend didn't go as planned. We were hoping to see Alistair's crew on Saturday but they turned out to be going to a craft fair, and then we had a tentative date for Sunday with Aidan and Donni but that went pear-shaped for some reason. So there was a lot of 'box-setting' with the TV and not much else.

I did finally manage to get Enterprise to collect the Golf on Saturday afternoon and I did our car's tyre pressures on Sunday.

The left foot was its usual erratic self, ranging from quite disabling to totally painless.

It kept up the painless bit for our walk this morning. Sometime before 7am I had heard rain on the roof above our bed. It sounded quite heavy, but had eased by the time I got downstairs. With a sweatshirt and cagoule, with my phone wrapped in a poo bag in my inside pocket, we did the usual route in 25 minutes 14 seconds, only getting a little wet. For the first time in a couple of weeks the left foot was totally painless for the entire walk.

I changed the beds and had a shower and shave after breakfast, ready for this afternoon's hospital visit in Derby. It was hard to know how much time to allow for the drive as it could take anything from just under an hour to two hours to get there, and then we could be queueing at the hospital car-park for ages. My appointment was for 15:05 so we decided to set out between 13:15 and 13:30. In the end we left just after 13:00, which was good because five minutes out I realised that I had forgotten my hospital letter and had to go back for it.

We had a brilliant run down the new 4-lane section from Junction 30 to Junction 28 of the M1, and an easy ride down the A38 to Derby. Having negotiated the ring road, we found a queue from the hospital entrance out onto the dual carriageway – rather dangerous. This turned out to have been caused by road 'improvements' inside the grounds. These could have been specifically designed to cause chaos. We had no chance of getting into our usual large car park and had to go past three others until we found a small one with a short queue right at the back of the main hospital. Even the ticket technology has been totally changed to use those weird square

chequerboard patterns printed on flimsy paper rather than stiff card. When we left the car, we had no idea where we were and how to get where we wanted to be! All this must have cost a fortune!

We eventually found the familiar Orthopaedic Outpatients department where I was given a ticket for an x-ray. I checked and it was only for one ankle, so I asked the nurse to check and she came back with both ankles covered. We hiked along to X-Ray, which was nearly empty, and after a surprisingly long wait I was called by a young woman who must have been the most beautiful radiographer in Derbyshire – a slim, dainty South Asian lass whose manner matched her beauty – and I don't use that word lightly. Her manner matched her looks, because she took a real interest in what had been done to my ankles and where. I was really sorry when she was finished!

We had the usual wait until we were taken to an examination room, and were able to see that both Stephen Milner and Claire Stevens were on duty. We had another wait in the cubicle, where one of my x-rays was on the screen. I managed to copy it on my phone, which Pat thought rather shocking:



Shortly afterwards Mr Milner arrived. I was really pleased because my last two reviews were taken by one of his junior colleagues. I got him today presumably because the 'catastrophic failure' of my ankle replacement (see x-ray above) was a lot worse than it was last year, and because he was able to tell me the bad news about the left ankle fusion: 'You have managed to break the rod'. The other x-ray, which I had not managed to copy, clearly showed a fine crack, which explained why I thought the ankle was able to flex by a small amount and probably accounts for the thick ridge of scar tissue across the junction of the shin with the instep, which is the main focus of all the pain I have been having recently. A previous x-ray of the left ankle fusion is on page 186.

We agreed that 'wait-and-see' would be the best choice rather than going for more surgery, in part at least because the older I get the more daunting the prospect of three months post-op rehab gets. He thought some memory-foam insoles would be a good idea, so I will order some, and maybe some gel ones too. I think some anti-inflammatory gel might be worth a try, too, especially for the burning pain up the inside of the ankle.

We managed to say 'hello' to Claire on the way out, which was nice.

Escaping from the hospital onto the A38 roundabout was a challenge, as were the two or three jams we had to deal with before we got onto the main road to the M1. The rest was a piece of cake. Our car felt pretty good after the VW.

In spite of fatigue and the time, we managed to rustle up a cooked meal before settling down for an exhausted evening.

## **Tuesday 26 September 2017**

I got up on a dull but dry morning with the temperature at about 13 degrees. Having been restless for a long time after my pee break at around 3am, I would really have liked to roll over for another hour, but I don't want to break my routine.

My feet were a little less comfortable than they were yesterday, but we had an uneventful walk apart from Bailey getting aggressive when I wanted to stop and say hello to a neighbour, whose black Lab I used to see every morning. He really went into attack mode and I had to drag him away. We finished the walk in 24 minutes 40 seconds, a little faster than yesterday.

After coffee I decided to take the two huge bags I filled with garden refuse last Thursday down to the tip, along with the crate of bottles and jars I forgot to take on the 8 September. The bags, which were full of the long spiky leaves of Lucifer, proved very difficult to empty into the green refuse skip, but I managed in the end. Then I needed to stop off at the Co-op for a few shopping essentials. I left emptying the car until after lunch, which Pat had sorted while I was tipping. The feet survived all this activity without giving me too much pain.

The rest of the day was fairly lazy. The left foot was mildly painful when I had been sitting for some time, but far less than it often has been.

I ordered a pair of memory foam insoles from an Ebay trader and I intend buying some diclofenac gel next time I am near a pharmacy. I intend to go into town for muelsi ingredients tomorrow morning, maybe getting some fish and some bits from Aldi (coffee, red wine, chocolate etc). I need to visit Boots, so I will have a look at gel insoles.

The feet behaved fairly well through the evening, which was a pleasant change.

## **Wednesday 27 September 2017**

I had a restful night until the last pee at about 6am but was restless after that until I got up at 7:05.

It was a still, dull and mild morning – in other words, a pretty nondescript one. The feet felt reasonable, so I decided to try ramping the walk back up to 30 minutes. The pace was good from the beginning, and we got much further in 12½ minutes than we have since reducing the walk to 25 minutes. We carried on and when we turned round at 15 minutes we were most of the way along the football-pitch instead of quite a way short of it. We had met the long-haired Alsation on the way out with just friendly greetings and met him again coming the opposite way round our route for another quick nuzzle. We met another large dog who was vaguely familiar and had an equally painless greeting with him.

For the first time since the term started there were tiny kids on scooters and little bikes with stabilisers coming our way, but we managed to use the wide grass verge to avoid them. We finished with a time of 30 minutes 33 seconds and feet feeling weary and a bit battered but with no serious pain. I had worked up a good sweat, which is a sign of some decent exercise.

I went straight into town straight after breakfast, starting with a brisk pull up the hill to the top of the market. The legs and feet coped very well with this in spite of the horrors revealed by my x-rays on Monday. I bought a salmon tail fillet and two sashimi-quality tuna steaks from Darren and went back down the hill to visit Boots and Holland & Barrett. I bought some Scholl gel insoles and a tube of Voltarol Gel at the first and my muesli ingredients and lots of cut-price sugar-free elderflower sweets from the second. From there, I did a quick drive up to Aldi for some essentials (such as red wine!) and a few frivolous buys before heading home.

After tunch I went out to collect a missed prescription from our local pharmacy, post a letter and query one of my prescriptions at the surgery. Finally, I called in at the village hall for my flu jab. Four birds – one stone, and this totalled up to three good walks in one day. Trying out the new Scholl insoles, I found the walking quite comfortable.

The left foot was moderately painful during the evening – the usual nonsense along the top of the foot to the big toe – but the well-practised changes of sitting position, with the lower leg perfectly vertical and the foot flat on the floor, kept the pain bearable. I had no trouble sitting up to read in bed.

### **Thursday 28 September 2017**

Too many pees through last night (four or five with the last around 6am) made for poor rest. I had hoped all the extra walking yesterday would have deepened my sleep, but the bloody bladder would not be denied. Then the telephone rang at 6:55 – one of the regular calls for the pub whose old number we took over ten or more years ago (we changed it because we had taken the previous one over from a hypnotherapist and we were getting loads of calls for her!).

I decided to stay up and was downstairs before 7:05. It was a dull, muggy morning after lots of overnight rain which had been kind enough to stop. When Bailey and I got to the gate I realised that I hadn't changed watches, so I had a couple of minutes trying to remember how to use the stopwatch on my titanium Casio. I managed, though with severe visibility problems, and we set off at a good pace in spite of yesterday's antics. The feet were just mildly painful. We turned at the same lamp-post as yesterday, just inside 15 minutes. On the way back we met the same group of infants as yesterday, but without bikes and scooters, and they wanted to meet Bailey. He was lovely with them. Then there was a tiny tot in a push-chair who also reacted well to him. We got home in 29 minutes 36 seconds – almost a minute faster than yesterday.

After doing my usual pre-breakfast admin spell at the computer, both legs felt quite weak when I stood up, which is hardly surprising after the distances I walked yesterday. Later, though, I managed to teeter on our two-step ladder to try sticking down some of the blisters in the hall wallpaper. The Scholl gel soles in the HiTecs did quite well.

My challenge for this afternoon was to retrieve a long text-message exchange which Pat had a few weeks ago with the manager of Anton's carer service. I had to copy each message on her phone into an email addressed to me and then copy the message text from each incoming email on the PC and paste it into an *OpenOffice* document, arranging the messages in chronological order and finally printing the result to add to Pat's file of information relating to her brother.

Then I found the last, biggest and most beautiful apple from our tree nestled among the grass, where it had fallen from the very top of the tree, avoiding bruising but not the largish bird which had chewed quite a lump out. Washed and surgically trimmed with a sharp knife, it proved to be the tastiest from the tree, too, Pat and I shared it,

with a few bits which even Bailey enjoyed. He isn't usually very impressed by fruit, but he obviously loved this apple.

Pat had done an amazing job finishing her loose cover for the three-seater sofa – following hours of stress it was done and looked very professional.

My feet felt weary during the evening but the usual pain was very mild, just needing frequent position changes while I was sitting. In the course of this I made an interesting discovery about my dodgy right knee. If I sat with the leg stretched out straight but relaxed, the kneecap was very mobile – more so than it should be, I was sure, and definitely much more than the other kneecap. I could slide it up and down and sideways and feel the bones grating together, suggesting that there was a shortage of cartilage. However, if I locked the knee joint hard the patella was held by the quad tendon from above and whatever the one below is called, allowing no movement whatever. I decided I should probably do this as a regular exercise.

### **Friday 29 September 2017**

I forgot to weigh myself before my first cup of tea again this morning. I took Pat a cup because she was going to Meadowhall (MeadowHELL!) with Sue.

It was a dull, warm and muggy morning, with heavy rain forecast, so I wore my cagoule over just a polo shirt and got very sweaty. It didn't rain. The feet felt bruised underneath by all the week's exertions but the other regular pains were very gentle. I managed a really brisk pace again. And with no interruptions got right to the end of the football-pitch in what felt like a good time, though I had forgotten to restart the 10-euro watch after the thir poo stop. I awarded myself an estimate of 30 minutes for the whole walk, giving a total of 2 hours 20 minutes and an average of 28 minutes for the week, which started with two nominal 25-minute walks and ended with three nominal 30-minute ones. The soles of both feet were feeling rather battered at the end but this soon eased.

Before Pat left I went up to the Co-op for the ingredients of the bakes she plans to make for Donka's birthday dinner tomorrow night. As soon as I was back I made coffee and got ready to finish watching *Game of Thrones* season 7. I was interrupted when I watched the penultimate episode (6) a couple of weeks ago so I decided to watch it again before episode 7. It was a good watch even second time around, and the final part was really gripping. It seemed frustratingly inconclusive though, and I was under the impression that season 7 was to be the last. However, a quick Google search revealed that there will be one more, with filming starting next month on six feature-length episodes, each expected to cost HBO \$15,000,000. I will be waiting some time, as season 8 is expected to premiere in 2018 or even early 2019, but I will not be alone!

### **Monday 2 October 2017**

We had a pleasant weekend of baking, Formula 1 and Donni's birthday gathering.

The nasty side of my personality was brought to the fore again by Ferrari's technical problems, which left Raikkonen out of the race and Vettel starting from the back of the grid. I was only mildly disappointed by Lewis's second place and really pleased for Red Bull's two grid places – particularly young Max's second career win on the day after his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. Fair play to Vettel: he did manage fourth from the back.

I got up on the dot of 7:05 this morning after two particularly good weekend lie-ins. It was a dull morning, quite windy but with the temperature at 17 degrees. The sun came out during our walk but didn't get high enough to be a real problem. We met Big Fred the pointer and Goldie the spaniel in friendly encounters, but had a job avoiding a guy with a Westie and a Cocker which went berserk when they saw Bailey coming. We did the football-pitch circuit in 30 minutes 15 seconds.

My left foot has been really painful over the weekend, possibly caused by the ProSport ankle support which I was trying out, but I had hardly any pain on this morning's walk. It did start aching more when I sat down to watch a movie with Bailey (*Lawrence of Arabia* in untra HD!) after Pat had gone off to Anton's.

We had a quick snack lunch when she got back and I went upstairs for my weekly wrestle with the mattresses and sheets – but not the king-size duvet, which I only change every other week because the covers are such a battle for Pat to iron! – leaving our beds smooth and aired ready for tonight.

Later on Pat was vacuuming in the bedroom when there was a fearsome crash which sent the dog charging from one end of the house to the other and back. It turned out that the window in our en-suite shower room had been blown open by a monster gust of wind. The window is side-hinged and it swept a heavy-bottomed glass tumbler off the sill. It dropped on the porcelain lid of the loo cistern and knocked two large pieces off one corner. Ince we had cleared up, I got online to register an insurance claim. The company will call me on Wednesday afternoon.

Pat took one of the two frozen jacket potatoes in a McCains pack for Anton, but he didn't want it, so she brought it home fully defrosted and I defrosted the other in the microwave. The skins were rather soggy, but the insides were okay with Branston baked beans and grated mature cheddar,

The left foot behaved quite well through the evening with a couple of stocking-footed trips to the loo.

### **Tuesday 3 October 2017**

I had an appalling night, kept awake or re-awakened by a persistent dry cough. Eventually, thoroughly fed up, I brought the little LED torch I use when logging my night-time loo visits back to bed and found a jar of Vapour Rub in my bedside drawer. With a generous dollop in each nostril and inhaling through my nose the coughs quickly started bringing up some phlegm which relieved the irritation long enough for me to get back to sleep.

I got up at 7:05 precisely. The sky was partly blue with a variety of clouds, some possibly offering rain, and the temperature was six degrees lower than yesterday's at 11 degrees.

The feet performed really well on the walk, with no significant pain, and we repeated yesterday's route in just under 30 minutes. The pace felt good and in spite of the low temperature I got home very sweaty and slightly out of breath. I was still coughing quite a lot and my nose had been runny throughout the walk. Could this be a reaction to last week's flu jab? I hope so.

After breakfast I felt quite groggy, with a bit of arrhythmia – my heart skipping a beat or delaying rather a long time before delivering one. I have had these on and off for many years, but it is always a bit unsettling.

Pat had a hospital appointment at 11:30 in Retford. Although I felt under the weather I insisted on driving her just in case they did anything that might make driving difficult. While I sat in the waiting room the coughing and runny nose got much worse, feeling like more than just a cold, so the flu jab reaction theory was beginning to look credible. When we got home I took two Paracetamol caplets and a decongestant capsule, which eased my symptoms between them, but by mid-afternoon, after I had taken one of the wheelie-bins out, I was feeling really unwell and incredibly tired, and consuming cough sweets at quite a rate. By the end of the day I was fairly convinced that this was just a bad cold that had caught up with me unexpectedly. I took two more Paracetamol caplets and another decongestant capsule at bedtime. As soon as I had done my teeth I started a Fisherman's Friend to suck while I read my book, and

put a dollop of vapour rub up each nostril before I put my light out, so that each inhalation would take a good dose of menthol vapour up my nose and down my windpipe to keep the cough loose.. The Wednesday morning walk was looking increasingly unlikely.

### **Wednesday 4 October 2017**

I had another horrible night in spite of the Fisherman's Friend and vapour rub, and decided that there was no way I would manage a walk this morning. I was still in bed, sweating, coughing, sneezing and cat-napping, at 8:30. Pat actually got up ahead of me and brought me a cup of tea. Soon after that I got up and went down for breakfast, feeling really grotty, and wasn't feeling much better when I did coffee at 11am.

I decided that what I had was a simple common cold, though a particularly virulent one. I stuck with the two Paracetamols and one decongestant every four hours. Blowing my nose was fairly effortless because the mucus was watery, but my violent sneezes and uncontrollable coughing were quite painful around the edges of my ribcage – just weary muscles, I hope, but over the past day or so I have been thinking 'chest pains'!. So far neither nostril is getting blocked so I am not using my steroid nasal spray. My eyes are very watery, which blurs my vision even more than it is usually blurred.

By 2pm I could cheerfully have gone back to bed for a good sleep, but I managed to resist the temptation.

We should have taken the dog to the vet for flea-proofing and worming, but I just didn't have the energy. Later, though, I managed to cook dinner.

Pat has another appointment, this time at the local GP surgery, tomorrow morning.

### **Thursday 5 October 2017**

I had a surprisingly good night in spite of an all-time record tally of visits to the loo: seven, no less, with the last at 7:40am! I felt surprisingly good, but once I had got up after a much-needed cup of tea I realised that I actually felt pretty grim: sore throat, headache, bunged-up nose...The full tally. I did feel better after breakfast, but was glad to settle down with the remainder of *Lawrence of Arabia* in untra HD and a cup of strong coffee. What a stupendous movie! It was about five minutes from finishing when Pat got back from the doctor.

We had a visit from a garden maintenance gang late in the morning and decided to let them loose on our trees, shrubs and hedges. This required me to go up the road to the ATM to get cash for them, which I managed quite well. By early evening my cold symptoms were getting pretty bad, and later on I felt really groggy. Itching at the back of my mouth, tickling up my nose, sneezing...so it went on.

I managed to enjoy a kipper for my dinner, though the red wine stung the back of my palate rather unpleasantly.

### **Friday 6 October 2017**

I gargled with antibacterial mouthwash, took two more Paracetamols and a decongestant before going to bed, squirted the steroid spray up both nostrils and gave each a smear of vapour rub to send menthol vapour down to where the cough lived. This worked well in terms of sleeping, but after the second loo visit at 5:30 I struggled to get back to sleep. I must have done eventually, though, because I didn't see Pat get up. I enjoyed the tea she brought me and then went down to breakfast with the most horrible creaking and wheezing coming with every breath.



I felt quite groggy through the morning, but the tubes had at least cleared a bit by midday. I still felt very tired, though, with a tickly soft palate and the most horrible creakings coming from my chest when I breathed out too vigorously. A Jakeman's cough sweet soothed things a bit.

While sitting, my left foot had begun to protest, so at about 3pm I went through to prepare the chicken wings for tonight's dinner. Once the wings and wedges were in the oven I did a quick and painless walk across the road for some coleslaw and milk. The HiTec shoes were really comfortable and walking was quite painless.

Later, after dinner, I found myself almost constantly changing position to ease the pain in the left foot. For a while I couldn't get much relief, but then it eased for the rest of the evening.

### **Saturday 7 October 2017**

Lying almost awake at around 8am I thought I must be recovering from this cold, but once I got up I found that it was actually getting much worse, with a muzzy, swimmy head, sinus pain and still-creaky exhalations. It didn't improve much through the morning, though I was able to enjoy the Japanese Grand Prix Qualifying.

I got the new satnav ready to get us to Doncaster Royal Infirmary on Wednesday when poor Pat has both an endoscopy and a colonoscopy to check for blood loss into her digestive tract as a possible explanation for anaemia. Both the preparation (totally empty bowels and stomach) and the procedures sound horrible.

Then I discovered that this clashed with my ophthalmology appointment at Bassetlaw Hospital, so I will have to phone and change that on Monday morning.

I had been feeling really feeble all day and was really looking forward to going back to bed. First we had to find out whether the latest BBC4 Scandianian thriller series would finish with anything other than total confusion. It didn't. That's about six Saturday evenings in a row wasted trying to make sense of it! Next week the Swedish detective Martin Beck will be back. That should make more sense.

The left ankle had only been mildly painful through the evening, which was a great relief..

### **Monday 9 October 2017**

Yesterday morning I did the normal Sunday routine: make a pot of tea and walk over to the shops for the paper and Anton's essentials. I did this with no problems, feeling quite a lot better. I felt better still when the Grand Prix finished with Lewis Winning, Mad Max Verstappen second, his team-mate Daniel Ricciardo third and Ferrari pretty much nowhere again. Pat started her diet in preparation for her hospital examination on Wednesday so I didn't bother much with food either.

I was restless towards the end of the night and got up at 7:02 feeling pretty good. My chest had cleared, more-or-less, and the catarrh was mostly gone too. We got out at 7:32 and, with the temperature at 12 degrees, did the usual route at a healthy pace, turning round in 15 minutes 11 seconds and finishing in 31 minutes 9 seconds, slightly slowed by a couple of friendly doggy encounters. I was sweating freely and slightly breathless when we got back, but felt no worse for the exercise. Bailey was full of beans after three missed walks last week.

I had to sort several admin things out while Pat was at Anton's. I needed to move the insurance claim for our broken cistern-lid, which we will probably have to pay for ourselves as the policy has a £200 excess, though the biggest problem is trying to find a matching lid online.

Pat is dieting in preparation for her colonoscopy and endoscopy examinations in Doncaster on Wednesday, so I've been busking a bit with nobody else to cook for.

She did a big tidy-up after our disappointing visit from the tree-and-shrub guys, generating a large heap of stuff which I added to what was already in the garden refuse bag (the big builder's one).

Early this evening my left foot was very painful indeed. I did the walk-around thing and then sat on the office chair to write this. Most of my cold/flu symptoms stayed away for most of the day. Fingers crossed...

### **Wednesday 11 October 2017**

I didn't get round to updating the diary yesterday.

My internal clock had failed me for once and it was 7:20 when I checked the time. We did the usual walk just over 31 minutes, and after breakfast I emptied the car, put the seats down, loaded the big bag of garden stuff into the boot and drove down to the tip. Only one green-waste skip was operating and this was pretty full, which would have made it difficult to shake the bag out if a kind gent hadn't offered to give me a lift with it. There had been quite a lot of sand and soil in the bag, which had big holes in the bottom, so I spent quite a while vacuuming the car boot. Later on, I got the Karcher pressure washer out and manhandled the heavy iron shelf unit from the conservatory out onto the patio. I gave its cream-and-muck finish a thorough going-over with the Dirt-Blaster wand, but the result was disappointing: we will still need to paint it.

After a breakfast of one slice of white bread with a scrape of butter and an even more meagre scrape of bramble jelly (no skin or seeds!), Pat spent most of the day sitting on the loo and drinking the purging mixture provided by the hospital. This went on through the evening until she eventually felt safe going to bed,

We set an alarm for 5am this morning so that she would be able to finish her bowel-cleaning purge before going to the hospital. She went downstairs and I managed to get back off to sleep, though I started worrying about the effects of the process on her blood sugar (she has Type 2 Diabetes) and got up at 6:40. This meant an early walk, so Bailey and I were back well before 8 o'clock.

Both feet behaved fairly well, though the right ankle was a bit sore when we set out. The time was just over 31 minutes again.

By midday Pat's system had calmed down. We set out for Doncaster at about 1:10pm for her 2:30 appointment, with the new Garmin satnav predicting a 25-minute journey, which proved accurate to the minute in spite of heavy traffic. The new device was really impressive, sounding exactly like a real human woman and mentioning details ignored by the old one such as traffic lights.

Doncaster Royal Infirmary turned out to be an enormous campus. We drove round for quite a while, past acres of reserved parking for staff, until we found a pay-and-display car-park with spaces. Amazingly, the machine would not accept the new pound coins, so I ended up trying one of the slippery new fivers. It spat this back on the first try but accepted it when I turned it round.

We saw no helpful signs, but a kind member of staff directed us into the Women's and Children's Hospital where we found signs pointing to the Endoscopy Suite. The walk felt like miles but we got there in the end and Pat was taken through almost immediately. I sat reading on my Kindle for about an hour, wondering if I could go in search of a drink and find my way back. Reassured by quite a few signs back to the Suite, I headed for the main outpatients area, which turned out to have a cafeteria where I got a reasonable cappuccino and a tasty pastry. I got back without trouble and managed to spot a few signs to the Women's and Children's Hospital, which we would need to find if we were to get back to the car.

Back to the Kindle, with an increasingly protesting left foot, until Pat was brought out after only a little over two hours. The procedures had turned out to be much less unpleasant than expected and had given her entire digestive tract a clean bill of health. Following the signs, we found ourself going downstairs into a wide tunnel with totlly blank walls, and must have walked at least half a mile before we went up and recognised the main entrance of the Women's and Children's Hospital. We spotted the car as soon as we stepped outside the doors, and found an exit from the campus a few metres away. Right or left? There seemed to be a bit more in the way of traffic and a major junction to the right, so I went that way and Mrs Garmin took over ina few seconds.

Despite over 24 hours of starvation Pat couldn't think what she would like to eat, and I wasn't very bothered. In the end I suggested sandwiches. She went for corned beef on white and I made myself a generous Cheddar and Branston on wholemeal followed by two hard-boiled eggs mashed in mayonnaise, which I ate like a pâté on more buttered wholemeal, all washed down with a glass of Toro Loco red.

Pat was hugely relieved to have got through the ordeal, which she had been dreading, and with the 'all-clear' verdict.

### **Thursday 12 October 2017**

Bailey and I had a good walk this morning, apart from an encounter with a little Westie. IT looked a bit scared of Bailey and he suddenly reacted by going into attack mode. I was able to retrain him with his lead but had to drag him away. We did the route in 30 minutes 56 seconds.

Pat slept well, and late, and was glad to go back to her usual breakfast of Oatibix. We had a chat about our chaotic eating, and decided we needed to get back to proper food. We put together a shopping list and I went to Sainsbury's, spending well under £100 in the hope of producing sensible meals.

After lunch we went up the road to the Original Factory Shop, where we bought a small, simple microwave for Anton and a more compact toaster than ours. Our sensible meal for tonight was planned: Baxter's Cock-a-Leekie soup with toasted cheese sandwiches. A step in the right direction, maybe – a small one, anyway! The toaster coped with fruit bread for afternoon tea without scorching it, but the soup was a dismal, watery brew with very few scraps of chicken, some leeks and a few bits of other vegetables. Baxters used to be a prestige brand, but now...?

My left foot behaved fairly well through the evening's sitting and allowed me to sit up and read in bed for as long as I wanted. My new trick is to lift the duvet up into a tent to take all pressure off the left big toe!

### **Friday 13 October 2017**

After a pee (only the second of the night) at around 5:15am, I catnapped pleasantly and overslept by five minutes when it was time to get up. I really wanted to roll over and cancel the day, but my discipline took over. Never mind – tomorrow is a lie-in day. I caught up, getting through my ablutions by the time the 7:30 news summary came on.

It was a mild morning at 16 degrees, with no sun but a bright, cloudy sky and quite a brisk wind. I had a birthday card with Amazon vouchers to post to my step-granddaughter Anastasia, now back at Exeter University after her year studying in Florida, so we took a modified version of the usual route to pass a postbox. This brought us back to the football-pitch, where we did an abrupt u-turn because Stanley and Louisa were loose. I had forgotten to start the stopwatch but knew more-or-less what time we had departed and the kitchen clocks gave me a time of roughly 30

minutes. I followed my usual plan for mistimed walks by logging today at the average for the week, which was 31 minutes 2 seconds.

My feet gave me very little trouble, which was encouraging.

I spent quite some time searching for a replacement cistern lid online and I seemed to have found the right one, but the name on the enquiry I sent in was the same as the guy who replied to me yesterday saying he didn't have the lid in stock.

Pat wanted to move some potted plants around so I shifted some of the really heavy ones and cut a piece of board to make a shelf between two pots. It was great to be using my beautiful Freud handheld circular saw again! Then there was the little matter of the teak table and its six chairs, all monstrously heavy, which needed to be moved down to the summer-house veranda for the winter – once the rusty parasol had been detached, which is quite a major task!

We did quite a lot more rearranging of plants and pots before settling down for a lazy afternoon and evening – apart from my making a big pot of kedgeree, which took the best part of an hour. The surprise was that I had kept the HiTec walking shoes on all day, and it never even occurred to me to take them off when I sat down after dinner. The left foot was quite comfortable for reading in bed, even.

### **Saturday 14 October 2017**

I had a lovely lie-in until just after 9am, able to relax in various positions.

Pat decided to do a bit more gardening after breakfast, so I got The Mighty Atco Admiral out and gave the lawn what I hoped would be its last cut before winter. Having done the mowing I got the little rechargeable trimmer out and managed to get the edges mostly tidy. Just to annoy me, the left foot was hurting badly by the time I finished, but it settled down by around 2:30pm.

Having eaten the last roll from my latest bake (from as long ago as late July), the one that was badly affected by the failure of the oven element, on Thursday, I decided yesterday that I should start a new batch. I gave the ferment a really good mix to combine the murkey liquid that accumulates with ageing before taking out 150 grams and feeding with 150 each of water and flour. It was showing plenty of bubbles yesterday but looked very sloppy. This morning it hadn't really improved, so I took 150 grams out again and fed it with 150 of water and flour again. By lunchtime it was back to its old self, having thickened and risen in its bowl, and had a fresh, slightly acidic smell. I decided that I would bake on Tuesday and put the bowl in the fridge.

We met Aidan and Donni at Whitby's in Rotherham for fish and chips at 5pm, managing to drive through the entry in convoy in spite of approaching from opposite directions.

My feet were still feeling battered at the end of the weekend.

### **Monday 16 October 2017**

Sunday was uneventful, with another long, comfortable lie-in. The feet allowed me to walk to the local shop for the paper and Anton's usual stuff.

I did a full roast dinner with the corn-fed chicken I had bought at Sainsbury's, using Simon Hopkinson's classic recipe. It was great to have roast potatoes, braised cabbage and boiled carrots with a rich gravy, but the chicken itself was disappointingly dry and tough although the cooking was the same as many I have done before. Back to boring battery birds – my daughter Sarah would be horrified!

I got up at 7am this morning, after a decent night's sleep despite quite a few pees, to a dull, grey start with a temperature of 14 degrees. My feet were aching – especially the left ankle area – and my legs felt weary, but I got round the route well enough. I

messed up the stopwatch so I added a minute to last week's average, logging 32 minutes.

I got our beds changed and the room vacuumed just before Pat left for Anton's. She was taking him for a hair-and-beard trim.

I watched *Kill Bill Volume 2*, which I thoroughly enjoyed, on Amazon's streaming service.

We are threatened with gale-force winds on the edge of Storm Ophelia later this afternoon, crossing the threshold at 41mph around 4pm, peaking at 50mph around 9pm and getting down to a modest 20mph at around 4am. Ireland is already taking quite a pounding, but I think our weather won't be too severe. The weather certainly got lively through the afternoon, but there was nothing that felt really threatening. It got fiercer through the evening, but still didn't seem really severe.

Before bed I mixed my ferment with water and flour to form the sponge – the first stage of mixing the dough.

## **Tuesday 17 October 2017**

I was woken at around 1am by really savage pain in the left foot. I tried changing to a range of positions, but none were comfortable. Eventually I sat on the side of my bed with the foot flat on the floor and fumbled to the dark to find a card of Paracetamol in my bedside drawer. I took two and stayed in the same position, which soothed the pain to some extent, and then lay down again and tried several positions. I must have succeeded and dozed off quite quickly, and when I awoke for a pee at 5:20 there was very little discomfort in the foot.

I got up at 7am to see a beautiful sunny morning. My bread sponge was very bubbly indeed.

It was still windy enough for me to hear the gusts from inside, and the wind felt quite chilly when we set out for our walk – the temperature was about 11 degrees – but seemed to ease as we walked. On the way back, the sun was getting up and the morning looked really promising. I had no real pain in my feet – just a dragging ache, perhaps from all last week's efforts. We had to change the route because Stanley was loose on the football-pitch again, and we did the slightly shorter circuit in just under 29 minutes.

I mixed the next lot of water and flour into my sponge before breakfast. The breadmaking process went on through the morning until the dough was ready for its 60-minute rest, at which point I hurried up the road to the barber shop, where I had an entertaining hour with the amusing lady barber and two other old codgers.

Pat was out at her hairdresser this afternoon, and I took the opportunity to watch an interesting documentary about the necessary conditions and technology the human race would need to colonise another planet. I was surprised how much progress had already been made.

I gave up on the corn-fed chicken and did tagliatelle al pesto for dinner. We both came to the conclusion that, wholesome as it is, wholewheat pasta really isn't very nice. I will be buying white spaghetti and tagliatelle when I do my next shop. I must also remember to top up the pesto stocks, green and red.

The left foot was hurting intermittently through the evening, but not severely. I had a good long read when I got into bed, but the foot suddenly started hurting quite badly after about 20 minutes. I had a walk to the loo and then sat on the edge of the bed for a few minutes. The pain eased, so I put the Kindle down and the light out.

## Wednesday 18 October 2017

Last night was a night of too-many pees, The last was at 6:30, after which I really wanted to stay in bed, but I got up at exactly 7am. There was a lot of dark cloud around so the bedroom was almost dark, making dressing a bit of a struggle. Nevertheless, the morning routine went quickly and smoothly and we were ready to walk at 7:35. The temperature was shown as 8 degrees on my phone, so I put a bettered pair of walking gloves in my fleece pocket. They stayed there, though throughout the walk, which was completed in 31½ minutes without mishap. There was no sign of Stanley and Louisa, so we did the usual route with only one slight hiccup when Bailey wanted to attack a Westie who was well out of reach. I called him to me and I was pleased that he stopped pulling and barking immediately and came back to me.

The feet were aching but with no sharp pains, which was a relief.

The specific problem with the left foot is really weird. I can often go 24 hours with no pain at all on top of the foot, even managing the clutch on the car without trouble. I can deal with our heavy petrol mower and even manhandle huge heavy bags of garden refuse to the tip. Then the pain will suddenly flare up while I am either sitting or lying down. A short walk round the house or sitting on the edge of my chair with the lower leg precisely vertical will usually stop the pain completely.

On the subject of garden refuse, I went out after breakfast to deal with all Pat's trimmings and prunings. I knew that one bag was very full and probably too heavy for me to deal with, and I found that she had started another one. I got the two together and transferred quite a lot of refuse from the first bag to the second and eventually got them both weighting about the same, which was more than I had expected. Pat declared that, in keeping with my repeated requests, she had only but vegetable matter in the bags – no root-balls with heavy soil. It was quite a job dragging the two bags up the garden to the side entry, where I had to move the wheelie-bins out of the way before I could heave the bags through to the driveway.

At this point the logistics got a bit complicated because everywhere I went the dog followed. I dragged the two bags up to the side gate and through to the car. Then I closed the side gate, bolted it from the inside and went round to the back door, diverting briefly to pick up a clean plastic tarpaulin to line the boot space. I went through the house and out of the front door. I took the parcel shelf out of the boot, took the plastic storage box where we keep all the travel bits out and into the front hall, folded the back seats down and covered the boot floor with the tarp, making sure that its back edge was folded over the edge of the boot mat. Then came the hard bit: putting on my heavy duty rigger's gloves, and lifted the two bags into the boot and pushed them as far forward as possible. They were both very heavy but just manageable. Finally I went back into the house, took my bum-bag (or 'sporrán' as I call it!) off the coat rack, clipped it round my waist and put my wallet and phone in. Ready at last, I went out, locked the front door to stop the dog opening it, opened the gates and drove the couple of miles to the tip ('Domestic Refuse Recycling Centre'). As on my last visit, there was only one green waste skip and it was very full already. When there is space I just lift the bag and tip it upside down, but I needed to be a bit more inventive today. I lifted the bag and set it upright on top of everybody else's waste and then managed to wrestle it onto its side and gradually coax it from round the huge ball of refuse. With one bag done I approached the second more confidently and was soon on my way home. The tarp had caught all the dust and stuff, so once I had slid it carefully out of the car I didn't need to vacuum the boot space this time. Mission accomplished – with no protest whatever from the mysterious left foot! However, once I sat down for coffee the strange pain I have been having behind my left hip started up – a cue for a good neck, shoulder and back workout.

I managed the workout, ably assisted by Bailey who insisted on lying down beside me while I did the floor exercises! Later, I got a slight twinge in the hip while reading, but nothing like as bad as usual, so I guess my belief in the power of mobilising and strengthening exercises is justified. Now all I need to do is recover my self-discipline and keep up the routine.

I haven't mentioned it before, but as well as walking and sitting with the lower leg vertical and the foot at a precise right-angle to it, I can sometimes reduce or eliminate the pain by moving the foot to the right so it is under my centre and tilt it onto its outside edge. I'm not sure whether I have mentioned the occasional very raw pain that runs up the inside of the left ankle. This is aggravated by walking but usually goes away very quickly.

### **Thursday 19 October 2017**

I had a strange start this morning. I had been up for only my second pee of the night at 5:20am and must have dropped back into quite a deep sleep. I was really jolted awake when the landline handset beside my bed started ringing. I grabbed it but couldn't find the answer button, so I had to fumble for the cord on my wall-light. By the time I found the button our answering function had cut in and within the few seconds the caller hung up. 1471 gave me a mobile number that didn't sound familiar, so it was probably yet another customer of the pub whose number BT gave us over a decade ago, ringing to ask if the pub staff had found whatever he or she had left behind in a drunken stupour. It was 6:55, so I decided to get up straight away. At least the light was on to help me to dress – a process which is becoming increasingly difficult as the mornings get darker.

This morning was dull and grey, dry and with no wind and quite mild at 12 degrees, but with heavy rain forecast for most of the day from 10am onwards.

Bailey and I were back from an uneventful and almost totally painless walk, completed in 30 minutes 48 seconds, in time for the beginning of the 8 o'clock news.

We decided to start putting the conservatory, which has been totally chaotic since the carpet was laid, back together, beginning with a repaint. I went to Wickes to get the paint we needed in the first serious rain we have had for a few weeks – and it *was* serious! I took the opportunity to do a bit of emergency shopping at Sainsbury's and was wet through by the time I got home. We spent the first half of the afternoon doing various preparation jobs. I painted over the stains caused by the leak which we had repaired recently and also indulged my obsession by dismantling the three twin-bulb wall lights, then partly unscrewing the light switch and two sockets so I could get a paintbrush behind them. I also had to grout along the edges of a heat-shrink stretch of skirting. Much of this involved me in working on my knees, something my battered legs react to very badly. Later I put two of the three lights back up, but it was getting too dark to do the third. I had to fix the two side screws for each light onto my Philips driver with BluTak and hope it wouldn't be knocked off while I was fumbling to match the threads. The left foot was quite painful when I was sitting down in the evening – not surprising after the day's exertions.

### **Friday 20 October 2017**

The left foot wouldn't settle for reading in bed either. Even the negligible weight of the spring/autumn down quilt resting on the big toe seemed to be enough to aggravate it, so I had to get both feet out from under it. Then, as once before, when I switched my light off and lay back to go to sleep it started hurting quite badly. I had to sit on the side of the bed with the lower leg vertical and the foot flat on the floor for about five minutes before the pain subsided.

It was fine this morning. I was restless after the night's third trip to the loo at 5:35, and when the bladder started demanding attention again after 6:30 I realised that further sleep was out of the question. I got up at 6:45 and we left for our walk as soon as the 7 o'clock news ended. I forgot the Friday weigh-in again!

It was a heavy, grey morning with the temperature at 12 degrees. There were quite a few small dogs being walked, which was fine, but on the way home we walked straight into Bloody Stanley's gang. Both aspiring alpha males went berserk, and we owners only just managed to keep them apart. I dragged Bailey up a convenient side alley until the coast was clear. Finally, the corgis were out in their driveway and started another confrontation. Again, I had to drag our dog away by sheer brute force. We finished the walk in a longer-than-usual time of 32 minutes 34 seconds.

Once I had had my second cup of tea and done my daily admin tasks (including writing the update above), I used some of the time I had gained by doing a full neck, shoulder and back exercise routine, this time without help from Bailey. The funny twinge behind me right hip has faded, but I need to get my whole skeleton working a little better.

### **Saturday 21 October 2017**

We had a real blitz in the conservatory, filling gaps between skirtings and walls with ready-mixed tile grout and then both emulsions walls like crazy. At the end of the day, both feeling seriously stiff and achy, we were well on the way to finishing, and by lunchtime today, with some more filling, the last of the painting was finished. We were really glad I had bought a big set of really nice Harris brushes which made accurate cutting-in fairly easy. While Pat was doing the last gloss-painting on the windowsills and skirting I cleared all the decorating stuff out of the conservatory, ready to start putting it back together as soon as she finished.

Alistair rang, and to my relief he suggested that they come here tomorrow. Pat is always too eager to volunteer us for the Buxton drive, as she is always eager to volunteer us for anything. She seems to think we (at 74 and 72) are all-powerful and the younger generation are helpless and stressed and need to have their lives made easy. This really drives me crazy.

By about 3:30pm we had the conservatory more-or-less back to its old self – that is chock-full of all sorts of bric-a-brac and odds-and-sods – foodie books too heavy to lift among them. We even had the centre-leaf back in the ancient Victorian oak dining table so that we could slide the pine coffee table underneath – the second study on my learning curve with a router after the fake Victorian table I built to replace the one Wide Number Two hijacked. My left foot had protested a little when we sat down at lunchtime but had recovered again by the time we stopped work.

By mid-afternoon the conservatory was fully restored. I went for my shower first and felt a bit more comfortable, but both of us were quite knackered, with aches and pains everywhere. The satisfaction of a job well done made this bearable, though.

### **Monday 23 October 2017**

Yesterday we had our first dog-meeting with Alistair's gang. The day started as a normal Sunday, but got quite complicated. I went to the shop for the paper and Anton's fags and milk as usual. Later, with Pat cooking for the evening meal I had to go back to the shop for mushrooms.

Al and Julie's new dog, Dobbie (named after the Malfoys' house elf in the Harry Potter stories) and our older one oscillated between playfulness and suspicion when we introduced them outside the front door and took them for a walk to the football-pitch. They played together quite well and we risked letting Bailey off his lead. The whole exercise went without mishap and we let them out into the garden as soon as



we got back. There was a lot of dog boxing and wrestling, similar to what Bailey and George always did. Dobbie did a lot of growling at Bailey with the occasional snap that was more of a gesture than actual aggression. He wasn't impressed. The boys really are growing up now. We can't believe that Ewan will be moving to the secondary school and Tom to the juniors in September.

Toward's dinner time I made my third visit to the shop, this time for soy sauce, so all ion all I got plenty of extra walking..

I had no real trouble from the feet until I sat up in bed to read. Once again the mysterious left foot became very painful. Eventually I sat on the side of the bed with the lower leg vertical and this eased things somewhat, but when I lay down I couldn't find a position for the foot which was completely pain-free. I must have got to sleep eventually, though.

This morning I was blissfully comfortable in bed after no less than five visits to the loo, having dozed off after each except for the last at about 5:30. I would have loved to stay in bed but once again self-discipline ruled and I got up at 7:05.

The temperature was 12 degrees, with light cloud and, as we set out, a stunning red sunrune. I didn't think I could manage the dog and the camera-phone to get a decent picture, but if I had I was sure it would have ended up on TV.

The foot had been fine – or as near as it ever gets to fine – when I got up, and everything behaved well for the walk – apart from the timekeeper! Once again, I forgot to restart the watch after a poo stop. Luckily I had noticed the time as we left – 7:33. I checked the time when we arrived back in the kitchen, knocked a bit off for getting out of the house and back in, and ended up with an estimate of 32 minutes. We didn't meet a single dog on the walk. Once home, the feet were aching a bit, but nothing to really bother me.

Today was when Aidan had asked us to house-sit for him to take in a delivery, so we had told Anton we would visit tomorrow. On reflection Aidan had arranged for a neighbour to sign for his stuff, which got us off the hook. Pat had come down in a lot of pain from her back this morning, which had kept her awake for much of the night, so we had a fairly lazy day, watching three hours of Beck, the Swedish detective, before dinner. I was in danger of nodding off. We are doing the Anton bit tomorrow, taking over a small manual-control microwave which Pat bought at the Co-op, plus a one-cup hot water dispenser donated by Jackie and Bob. Whether he will be able to manage either of these remains to be seen.

## **Tuesday 24 October 2017**

Last night, after a largely pain-free day, the left foot did its peculiar trick of suddenly starting to hurt when I had been sitting up in bed for around 20 minutes. I can't make head or tail of this. I suppose I ought to get some medical advice...

I got up at 6:55 and managed to get dressed in time for almost all of the 7 o'clock BBC news. The temperature was still around 12 degrees but it was a dull and slightly drizzly morning, with just the hint of red in the eastern sky. I had to divert the walk via the post-box because I finished my three stool-sample collections for bowel cancer screening this morning and I had to get the envelope in the post. The loop to post it made the route almost exactly the same length as the usual one, and we finished the walk in 30 minutes 53 seconds with no close doggy encounters at all. The feet were more-or-less fine.

After breakfast I loaded the microwave and the hot-water dispenser for Anton in the car boot, but discussing them en-route we decided to hang onto the microwave until we got the stick-on buttons which will enable Enton to set it's power and time by

touch. He was in an unusually good mood and was quite impressed with the water dispenser.

We stopped off at Aldi on the way home and picked up an amazing lot of shopping – amazing as my list only occupied a 9cm square of paper. We had a belated morning coffee – two cups each and double biscuits – and didn't bother with any lunch. In the afternoon Pat did some stuff in the garden, and between helping her I finally cleared the mountain of paper that has been sitting and growing on the study desk for ages. As it turned out, almost everything ended up in the recycling bin. I also phoned the garage about the various funny noises being emitted by the car, Someone was supposed to call be back, but nobody did. I will have to chase them tomorrow.

### **Wednesday 25 October 2017**

The left foot was just a bit niggly while I was reading in bed last night, but I was able to relax and get to sleep quickly. I got up at 6:30 to visit the loo, spoiling the total of two visits for the night. There were raindrops on the en-suite window but the sky was crystal clear with the brightest stars clearly visible, including the mighty constellation of Orion. The smaller and less-bright ones were lost as the sky began to lighten.

I went back to bed and had a blissfully comfortable last half-hour – just a faint niggle from the right shoulder. I was up at 6:55 and downstairs by a minute past 7, so I caught all the news. The temperature was 12 degrees yet again, having got close to 20 yesterday afternoon.

I remembered to change watches, but absent-mindedly forgot to start the stopwatch as we started walking, so I would have to estimate the time. Luckily I had noticed the time as we left the kitchen. We had two friendly encounters, with Goldie being very friendly and a larger terrier whom we hadn't met before. There was also the regular grumpy one with the old black greyhound – alpha-male problems again? My left foot had been rather achey since I got up but didn't really bother me on the walk. The estimated time was 32½ minutes.

Before and after breakfast I continued my efforts to keep the desk clear by updating my budget forecast spreadsheet through to the end of the year. As usual the forecast is looking healthy but will probably take a few knocks before Christmas!

We skipped lunch by having a late coffee with a biscuit each, and left for my eye-clinic appointment just after 3pm. This was the usual epic, with a brief vision test shortly after my appointment time and then long delays between consultations. A nice lady called Jane administered the visual field test, which checks for loss of peripheral vision, and then put two different sets of drops in my eyes. I then had a very long wait, but was rewarded by being called in by the consultant, Mr Dinakaran. After my previous rather disappointing visit he was brilliant. Talking and listening to me and doing a very thorough examination with the aid of two more lots of drops. He was aware that floaters were my main problem, told me I had no signs of glaucoma (brilliant news!) and didn't even mention cataracts. However, having taken several images of my retinas he decided that my optic nerves needed checking and gave me a request for an MRI brain scan! He was really excellent, standing up to shake hands when I was leaving and making lots of reassuring noises. We called in at the MRI unit to drop his form off and finally got home at about 6pm. The long waits were made tolerable by Pat having her Kindle and me having synchronised my iPhone Kindle app before leaving home. I was amazed that I could actually read this with the dilating drop at work.

Our gastronomic laziness continued with a dinner consisting of crisps and nuts, mine washed down with whatever was left in my bottle of red and Pat's with a can of elderflower tonic water.

The troublesome foot behaved fairly well while sitting in the hospital but got very painful during the evening. I had to sit on the side of the bed for a while before going to sleep.

### **Thursday 26 October 2017**

I got up just before 7am to be greeted by an almost pitch-dark morning, which lightened fairly quickly. Yet again, the temperature was shown on my phone as 12 degrees. By the time we were ready to go out, it was quite light. The clocks go back this weekend, which means that dusk will arrive depressingly early but first light will be much earlier.

We had a close encounter with Bloody Stanley again. His entourage appeared out of the cul-de-sac we were approaching and both males went berserk. I managed to hold Bailey back so that Mrs Stanley could get her team round the corner and carry on to the football pitch. I decided to do the postbox loop, but this was complicated when, walking back up towards the footpath, we met a woman coming out of her house with a lovely docile mature golden Lab, who immediately came to greet Bailey, and a huge and very aggressive dog whose breed I couldn't even guess at. He was on the lead and the woman managed to hold him but of course Bailey responded to his barking and straining at the leash, putting an end to his friendly encounter with the Lab. I managed to drag him away and we got home in, for once, an accurate time of 31 minutes 42 seconds.

At around 10am I realised that I was getting nasty little pain spasms in different bits of my back, so I decided to do another full neck, shoulders and back exercise routine. This was made far more enjoyable when I got the the floor exercises and Bailey decided to join in. I ended up lying on my back with him also on his back and my arm round him so I could give him a belly rub while I got my breath back.

Pat had a 2:30pm appointment at the surgery and was gone quite a while by the time she had been up the road for a browse in the factory shop. I had a quick survey of Amazon Video and watched a rather confusing SF movie.

I had defrosted two small salmon fillets which I floured and fried to serve with new potatoes and frozen petits pois – a proper meal at last! I finished off the apple crumble Pat had made for Alistair's lot on Sunday with toffee sauce and my custard. I had another alcohol-free night, drinking (and really enjoying) chilled tap-water with some offcuts of home-grown lemon.

The foot was only moderately painful through the evening, responding well to changes of position. I needed five minutes sitting on the side of the bed after reading to help me relax.

### **Friday 27 October 2017**

I was blissfully comfortable, lying awake in bed from around 6am after only two trips to the loo. I was really wishing it was Saturday as I would have loved another couple of hours in bed. I got up at 7am, though, groping in the faint blue light from the clock/radio to find my way into my clothes. Getting a pair of white boxers with a white label at the back was a challenge, but my fingers quickly found the fly opening by sheer luck. I can't remember ever being pleased that the clocks were about to go back, but the thought of much-earlier daylight in the mornings was really welcome.

I forgot the Friday weigh-in yet again.

The sun rose rapidly to reveal a lovely clear sky, but the temperature was quite a bit colder than yesterday's at only 8 degrees. Time for a sweatshirt under the fleece. It didn't feel too cold when we got out at just before 7:35, so the gloves stayed in the jacket pocket. The walk was uneventful, with me only feeling the chilly wind when we

got onto the short northward leg. By my low standards, the feet were just fine, and we did the walk in 31½ minutes .

A walk down the garden with Bailey when we got back revealed that the leak from the waterfall had dropped the pond level by about 20cm, so I had to unroll the hose again today, after hiding it from Ewan and Tom on Sunday, to top up.

My ridiculous left foot got its own back for the painless walk by becoming very *painful* when I sat down for a good read. The various positions I have discovered to relieve the pain didn't do much good. Only walking around the house in my socks helped.

We were both feeling unaccountably weary, so very little got done during the day. However, I did manage to produce roasted chicken wings with potato wedges and (courtesy of the Co-op) coleslaw, followed by Aldi's budget version of Magnums.

The left foot continued its stupid antics. During the afternoon it was really painful and I couldn't control the pain with changes to the leg's position. However, when I got on my feet to cook dinner the pain went away and didn't come back at all. This really is totally weird!

Channel 4 has full live coverage of the Mexican Grand Prix this weekend but the timing is insane, so it might have been better if they were doing recorded highlights.

### **Saturday 28 October 2017**

I was really looking forward to my lie-in this morning, but I didn't get a lot of extra sleep. I was up to the loo at 7:15, just a quarter of an hour later than I get up during the week, and tried very hard to get back to sleep by counting backwards from 200 in my head. I lost track quite a few times, so I must have dozed, but gave up eventually, getting up at 8:45.

The stupid left foot behaved reasonably until I sat down after breakfast, and I had to go for a long walk round the house in my socks followed by washing the breakfast dishes, before it settled down again. Sitting on the office chair was pretty good.

It was quite bad for most of the afternoon but when I had spent quite a while standing in the kitchen cooking dinner (sausages, bacon, eggs, wedges and beans) it settled down and stayed quite comfortable right through the evening. The pattern really is hard to figure out.

At 9am tomorrow the clocks will show 8am, so I hope my body will let me relax to enjoy the extra hour. If not, I will come down early and watch the Grand Prix qualifying – I was nearly caught out tonight because Channel 4 is only showing edited highlights despite having the live coverage rights for this race. Thankfully, Pat had seen who was on pole on her phone and warned me to switch the TV off at once.

### **Sunday 29 October 2017**

I got all the clocks sorted out for the winter when I got up and watched my recording on the Mexican qualifying.

Later on I made a big batch of Bolognese sauce using 750g of lean mince and a big jar of Dolmio sauce. Then I had a pint of white sauce. Instead of my usual practice of boiling lasagna sheets ('lasagna' is singular and 'lasagne' is plural – not a lot of people know that!) I poured boiling water into the serving dish and slid the sheets in. They were plenty soft enough by the time I wanted to build the dish. I even found a bowl of grated cheddar in the fridge – just enough to top the dish.

We watched the two 80-minute episodes of *Beck*, recorded last night, through the afternoon and evening as there was very little we wanted to watch apart from *Blue Planet II*, which was stunning to look at and fascinating to listen to.

The left foot was very badly behaving through the evening, to the extent that, having turned in to sleep I went downstairs and took two 200mg Ibuprofen and rubbed on a small amount of the same drug in gel form.

That seemed to do the trick and I had a good night.

### **Monday 30 October 2017**

It was great to get up in broad daylight at 7 o'clock – no searching in the dark for the label or the fly on the boxers! The temperature was shown as 3 degrees, so I put a sweatshirt on under my fleece and made sure the gloves were in the pocket. The air was dry, and I didn't need to put them on.

I had a few bouts of skipped heartbeats over the weekend, so I decided to keep the walk in sight of pedestrians and drivers, just in case. Before we went out, I did some deep breathing and this seemed to calm things down. I have had these palpitations on and mostly off over several decades, usually at time of stress, without ever raising a GP's eyebrow. We walked the full length of our street in 28 minutes 23 seconds without mishaps.

We went over to Anton's with the new microwave Pat had bought for him – a sexy black one because he likes black things! I got the old one of ours which we gave him ages ago and his vision won't allow him to use any more out to the car and installed the new one. Pat put sticky little dome spots at strategic points so he can point the control switches where he needs them. He seemed pretty pleased, and even more so when he had heated a sausage roll and was enjoying eating it. From there we went over to see Barney and his Mum. He is having a hard time dealing with his university pressures and his open-heart surgery due very soon, but he seemed to be coping amazingly while we were there. We took him and mum Nicky out for a pub lunch in the hills near Barney's old secondary school at Bradfield. The food was excellent and the beer locally brewed.

I took the Ibuprofen gel up to bed with me and was able to read and sleep without too much pain.

### **Tuesday 31 October 2017**

No walk this morning, because I had an 8:30am appointment for the brain scan requested by my eye consultant. I can either let myself off the hook for one day or do a walk on Saturday.

I had never had an MRI scan, and to have one focussed entirely on my head was pretty dire. It seemed to go on forever (actually about 30 minutes) with a sequence of truly horrendous noises drowning out the local pop radio on the headphones-cum-ear defenders. I coped with the process but was hugely relieved when it was over and felt quite wobbly for a while after being released from the monstrous machine. I was glad Pat had come with me because I didn't fancy driving feeling as I did. By the time we had got home and had a late breakfast I was feeling more human but still a bit battered. Give me major ankle surgery while fully conscious under a spinal anaesthetic anytime – much less of an ordeal than the head scan!

I got the results back from the bowel cancer screening this morning. Apparently my result was 'unclear', possibly caused by bleeding gums or piles. I had been lucky to take my three specimens when there was no blood on the loo-paper, but apparently there was some fully absorbed into the faeces. Oh well – at least I now know how to capture my stools (thank heaven for takeaway boxes that fit beautifully in the loo pan) and take the samples having done the test once.

I finished unloading the car from yesterday's visit Anton's, getting our old microwave stashed tidily in the summer house in case anybody else wants it.

It is beginning to look as if my simple strategy of deleting unopened emails which I recognise as coming from spammers causes the senders' systems to stop sending them to me. Fingers crossed...

The left foot was quite painful whenever I sat down for any length of time, but it responded to being taken for a little walk and sitting on the edge of my chair with the lower leg vertical. I got some twinges in the lower back when bending and twisting, so I did a neck, shoulders and back routine.

By 5pm I was very tired, probably in part a reaction to the MRI and the nervous sleeplessness that had preceded it. I was looking forward to getting to bed fairly early.

After a bad afternoon, the stupid left foot was almost painless for the whole evening. Crazy!

### **Wednesday 1 November 2017**

Last night was a five-pee one, and I really struggled to sleep once the sequence had started. I was actually quite glad to get up at 7 o'clock to break the cycle of worrying about everything I could think of.

It was a pleasant morning with light cloud and patches of blue, and a temperature of around 11 degrees. It got less pleasant when I found a huge pile of semi-diarrhoea just outside the kitchen doorway. Bailey doesn't often have accidents, but when he does he doesn't do things by halves. By the time I got this barely-stable dollop scooped up and tipped down the loo, and the carpet sponged and sprayed (I was so glad we had gone for polypropylene this time rather than wool!), my schedule was totally disrupted. My chest was feeling quite normal after a couple of days of tightness and palpitations, so I decided to get back on the usual route – though cutting it a bit short after yesterday's ordeal. We finished the shortened walk in 24¼ minutes with no serious complaints from the feet.

Over breakfast my chest did feel a little tight, so I made a decision, I remember over the years having my anti-inflammatory prescriptions changed by the GPs because of a correlation with heart problems. I already take a pill to suppress stomach acid production as a side-effect of the anti-inflammatories, so I think it is time to try doing without them altogether. As of this morning I will stop taking Naproxen and see how things go. I honestly have no idea whether or not they are helping my inflammation and pain. If I don't take Naproxen I shouldn't need Omeprazole for the acid, so I will knock those on the head too. That will leave me taking only the Cetirizine antihistamine for non-allergic mild rhinitis and Tamsulosin to regulate my nocturnal peeing – which, it seems, might also be affected by the Naproxen. We will see.

I fried salmon fillets and served them with boiled new potatoes and Bird's Eye petits pois, probably the best peas you can buy.

The left foot got through the day more comfortably than it has most days this week, which suggests that the Naproxen hasn't been doing much good. I gave it a wipe of Ibuprofen gel before I got into bed which seemed to help. I think I will buy a tube of Voltarol gel. This is expensive but it contains Diclofenac, the anti-inflammatory I was on before Naproxen.

### **Thursday 2 November 2017**

Gosh! Bonfire Night this weekend!

I had a restless night with five trips to the loo but relaxed in between, catching some sleep and not getting into trouble with my head. I have been reluctant to check my puls but did so while in bed and counted over 20 beats without a hiccup.

My phone said 3 degrees for Worksop when I got downstairs, but our outside thermometer and the BBC weather app said 10. It was dull, with no wind.

There were no doggy disasters on the carpet this morning.

We did the shortened walk, as yesterday, in 24 minutes 12 seconds. Bailey stopped for three poos, the first a normal, firm one, but the other two a bit soft for bagging, though I managed to get them in the bag without getting my hands messy. We had no close encounters with other dogs.

My feet were fairly uncomfortable when we set out and quite sore by the time we got home.

After breakfast I took only Cetirizine – no Naproxen or Omeprazole. I don't even know if the Cetirizine helps my nose, so I may try doing a week without. After dinner I will be taking only Tamsulosin. This did reduce my night-time trips to the loo when I first started, so I think I will stick with it.

Pat was going out with her friends Sue and Steph. Sue picked her up at about 9:30, leaving me to make whatever I liked of the morning – and maybe of the afternoon. I watched the first four episodes of *Bosch* Season Two and then had a go at supergluing our broken upstairs cistern top because a replacement doesn't appear to be available and I haven't been able to wake up a plumber to supply and fit a new cistern and top.

Having left that to set (or not) I went back on the Rated People website where I found MarkI, who leakproofed the conservatory, and put in a request for quotes for the cistern.

I then decided to check my pulse. Initially it was missing one or two beats in every ten but when I started breathing regularly and deeply the misses almost stopped.

Pat came back from M&S with two packs of Coquilles St-Jacques – scallops in their shells with mashed potato nests topped with cheese. Yum!

My lower legs and feet got steadily stiffer and more painful as the evening went by. As usual the left foot was the worst, but a rub of Ibuprofen gel eased this and I got off to sleep without difficulty.

### **Friday 3 November 2017**

I was restless for an hour or so before I got up at 7, breathing fairly deeply and rhythmically because my chest felt rather tight. It felt better once I was on the move. The morning was dull and cool at about 8 degrees, with a gentle south-westerly, where we were exposed to it, feeling just a little fresh.

The feet felt reasonable while I was getting ready for the walk.

The walk went well and I decided to try going back to the 30-minute route, but when we got to the start of the field I saw Stanley and Louisa at the far end and decided to turn back. We had one wrestle when Bailey saw a cat and streaked off after it. It took me a few seconds to lock the lead and he nearly dislocated my sore right shoulder when he hit the end-stop. After that we had a peaceful greeting with a medium-sized terrier which we had met a few times and completed the walk in 27 minutes 51 seconds. My chest felt fine throughout the walk, but the feet were feeling quite battered by the time we got home.

I bought a tube of Voltarol gel when I went to the surgery and the pharmacy for a new prescription for Pat. It seemed to help my strange feet but certainly wasn't a miracle cure. I think I am going to have to contact the GP and get the feet looked at.

We had a lazy afternoon watching Rizzoli and Isles on Amazon and then a Danish thriller on All4. Then we had Heinz tomato soup with Aunit Bessie's oven chips. Disgraceful but really tasty!

### **Monday 6 November 2017**

The weekend was pretty uneventful, the high spot being a visit to our favourite butcher, mostly for Anton-food but also for Sunday dinner and a meal for Pat to take up to Glasgow on the 25<sup>th</sup>. She will be away for three nights. I actually managed a proper roast dinner with a nice shoulder of lamb, and there will be plenty to eat cold with pickles this evening.

We needed to get to Anton's early this morning for a meeting with a newly-discovered social worker, so I was up before 6:30 for our walk. It was very cold when I got up, for the first time this year – very close to zero. However, the sky was clear with a little sunshine and we had a very enjoyable half-hour walk.

After breakfast Pat got into her usual cooking for Anton and I grabbed a quick shower. The car was very icy and took quite a lot of clearing, but the drive over was uneventful and the meeting was really positive. The social worker, Julie, was in her fifties and really down-to-earth. Having looked at what was supposed to be a log of Anton's care visits and finding it extraordinarily sparse, she had no hesitation in deciding to sack his current provider and set up a meeting with another company which is run by an old friend named Rachael – the leader of the team that looked after Anton so well up to a few years ago. This was exactly the outcome we were hoping for, but we didn't expect it to happen so fast! As a result, we came home feeling really pleased. The meeting is set for 9am on Friday, so another disrupted morning, but that will be a very small price to pay.

We got home in time for very belated coffees and sat with them feeling really smug. At last, the chance of something really positive happening for poor old Anton.

The left foot was very sore by late afternoon and early evening, but responded to a dab of Voltarol gel and I settled down to sleep fairly easily.

### **Tuesday 7 November 2017**

I was half awake and half asleep, with little cat-naps, for quite a long time before I got up this morning. The weather was a total contrast to yesterday's, dull and grey with the temperature at around 10 degrees.

Last week I was sure I had left my fleece at Anton's when it was actually in the back of the car. This week I was even more sure. I remembered hanging it on the back of one of his kitchen chairs. So I wore my ski jacket over my polo shirt. There was a card to post to my daughter Sarah so I decided to try a different route, up to the shopping precinct and beyond to one of our two village post offices. The roads all have grass verges, so they were ideal for Bailey. We got there in about 8 minutes and then zig-zagged back to the village hall to join the return half of our usual walk. We had a glimpse of the football pitch and saw Stanley and Louisa playing there. We completed the circuit in exactly 29 minutes. By the end my feet were sore, but nothing I couldn't stand.

Towards lunchtime the left foot was getting very painful so I decided it was time to see if the new 'AskMyGP' facility adopted by our practice would work. From the practice website I was able to navigate to an area that allowed me to give comprehensive answers to questions and explain exactly what my problem was. In less than half an hour one of the doctors called me. He didn't think a visit to the surgery would help, but told me to try taking the Naproxen I stopped taking recently, and that I should contact Stephen Milner if the problem got a lot worse. I can't imagine what he could do if the metal rod has cracked right through, short of screwing strips to it (too much



*Supervet!*). Maybe some sort of splint could stop the ankle flexing, which I am sure is what is causing the swelling and pain, but neither of the ones I currently have would do that effectively as they allow normal ankle function but with support..

The Voltarol gel has been quite good at relieving the pain, but I don't think I can use this when taking Naproxen – too much NSAID in the system. I was only taking one pill a day when I decided to stop altogether but he suggested going back to two for my severe pain. I'll try this. The pain is so intermittent that it will be difficult to be sure that the drug either is or isn't working!

'AskMyGP' seems to work quite well and will suit me as someone who can write coherently about my problems.

I took one Naproxen and one Omeprazole after dinner, and the evening and night were fairly clear of foot pain.

### **Wednesday 8 November 2017**

Whether it was the Naproxen, I don't know, but I only got up for one pee at about 3:15am, and had a pleasantly drowsy time from then on, until I checked the time at just 7 o'clock and got up free of pain and nicely wide-awake,

It was a beautiful clear morning with the temperature at around 3 degrees and the sun rising from a bank of dark cloud far away on the Eastern horizon. There was no wind and, with a sweatshirt under my ski jacket and without gloves, I was pleasantly warm. The feet were feeling quite good and we set out at a good pace. We did the usual route, and my legs and feet were feeling only a little sore and weary by the time we got home. The sun hardly got above the houses and trees as we walked eastward, so no dazzle. We had one encounter with a dog a little bigger than Bailey which ended in a slight stop initiated by our normally gentle and friendly dog.

I took one Omeprazole and one Naproxen after breakfast, and spent part of the morning writing a detailed list of the problems we have been having with the car, trying to be very specific. This was while waiting for our annual visit from the chimney-sweep, and while Pat was struggling with paperwork related to Anton's problems.

When the sweep had done his work and I had brought in the large log basket and part-filled it with wood, finally vacuuming various traces of soot and sawdust, Pat made toasted Cheddar sandwiches for lunch.

Then I went out and checked the tyre-pressures on the car, after which – at about the fourth attempt – I managed to pair each of the three doorbell sounders to the pushbutton beside the front door, so we now get chimes in the hall, the sittingroom and the kitchen, and we don't have to keep stocks of C or D batteries for the sounders, each of which plugs directly into a mains socket. Only the pushbutton will need its CR2032 lithium battery changing occasionally. This process nearly drove Bailey insane because he gets wildly excited when anyone comes to the door and rings the bell.

So far I am fairly convinced that the Naproxen is relieving the pain and inflammation in my feet, and that after just two tablets.

None of the day's various contortions caused my stupid feet any serious pain. Twinges, but nothing too drastic.

It never ceases to amaze me that we now have so many small, dedicated, self-contained microcomputers around the house. Just on my bedside table at night I have my Kindle, my Iphone, my Casio radio-controlled, solar-charged analogue/digital watch and one of the house phone's four handsets. On the dressing table there is an alarm-clock with a built-in digital radio receiver. That is at least five

computers! The wi-fi connected smart TV really is very smart, as are the FreeSat box, with its external hard drive, and the DVD player. In the corner of the sitting room sits the PlusNet router, connecting the TV and our phones to the mighty Internet. In the kitchen, the microwave and the fridge are microprocessor-based, as are the new freezer, the washer and probably the tumble-dryer. Then there is the DAB/FM radio, CD player and cassette player. Oh yes – there is a digital TV in there too. Our car is pretty brainy, and our new Garmin satnav is a very clever computer indeed.

One of the more exasperating features of the new doorbell system is that the sounders ring when I lock and unlock the car with the remote keyfob. This, of course, sets the dog off. However, now I have paired all three sounders to the pushbutton at the front door they ignore the car remote. Peace is restored.

### **Thursday 9 November 2017**

I really didn't want to get up this morning. My guts had felt bloated and sore before going to bed, though my usual half-glass of semi-skimmed had eased the discomfort. They felt reasonable early in the morning, surprisingly. I just felt very comfortable lying face-down and planning alternative strategies for the walk, but I finally looked at the clock at 7:15 and got up. I regretted this immediately because my left foot was one big ache and protested when I put weight on it.

This is fairly common after a night in bed – severe stiffening after eight hours without exercise, I suppose. It usually clears quickly when I start walking, and by the time I had got downstairs to the kitchen it felt much better.

Pat had to come down for her newly-prescribed iron tablets, so I gave her a cup of tea to take back to bed.

It was a mild (11 degrees), grey morning with a very fine drizzle just about visible on the windows. We started the usual route but I was fairly sure I would want to take the shorter route home. In the event, I managed quite well and we actually got round in just over 25 minutes with the foot feeling quite good. We met a friendly little long-haired dachshund, but nothing else.

Pat was on the move but still upstairs when we got back. We were going to see Barney for a couple of hours while his Mum was at work, having declined the idea of meeting up much later with his Mum and Nana for fish and chips at Whitby's. This way we and Barney would get a few words in edgeways!

We had an enjoyable couple of hours with Barney, who is coping much better now with his worries about his surgery and what to do about university. His Mum, Nicky, dropped in during her lunch break but we got plenty of time alone with our huge grandson. We stopped off to fill up with diesel and shop at Sainsbury's on the way home. We didn't feel like a heavy meal, so we had wonderfully-creamy scrambled eggs (fresh from our neighbours' hens across the road) with wholemeal toast. I added some leftover bits of bacon, nicely grilled, and we had a pleasant little Bonne Maman caramel *Panna Cotta* dessert each.

I think the Naproxen is really working now, taken after breakfast and dinner. The legs and feet really are feeling better.

### **Friday 10 November 2017**

I managed to get out of bed at 6:45am, allowing plenty of time to get through the morning routine in time for the 10am meeting at Anton's. We had a brisk 27½-minute walk round the usual route, by which time Pat was on the move. Again, the legs and feet did quite well.

We got off to Anton's early enough to get us there for about 9:45, but the other two people we were meeting were already there. Julie, the newly-discovered social

worker, had arranged the meeting and we had a really lovely reunion with Rachael, who was the social work leader of the team that looked after Anton some years ago and now runs a company providing care and support (because the post-Thatcher model of council support is all about farming the work out to the private sector). Anton was over the moon to see her after quite a few years. We were so glad to hear that her firm will be taking him over from his current and really ineffective provider. It got better when we learned that Andy, the support-worker from the current firm who had been better than all the others with Anton, was now working for Rachael. We felt as if all our Christmases had come at once! Rachael had agreed to take Anton on at very short notice, which wasn't going to be easy for her to organise, delayed only by the existing lot's minimum notice condition. In a month, the change will be effective.

I can't exaggerate the sheer delight we both felt. Rachael AND Andy was the outcome we had been dreaming of ever since Julie said she would change Anton's care provider.

We had crumpets with Marmite and syrup for lunch and Pat started making a small batch of bramble jelly with berries picked by our friend John. I was waiting for a box of wings from Sainsbury's to defrost for dinner. Plenty of kitchen time on my feet didn't cause any grief, and I had a special success with potato wedges: I used Maris Pipers rather than Lady Balfours and peeled them because they were rather spotty. I cut them into quarters lengthwise and dropped the wedges into already-boiling water, parboiling until the outer eighth of an inch was quite soft. Then I drained them and let them steam before tossing them with oil, salt and pepper and roasting them. Our over was playing silly buggers, so I finished them under the grill and got beautifully browned and crisped wedges which were great dipped in mayonnaise. I used the microwave's 'convection' setting to cook a tightly-packed tray of well-oiled and seasoned wings, and the total result was very tasty indeed. Next time I will make my own coleslaw as well...

### **Saturday 11 November 2017**

Despite my concerns about the car's reliability we took a chance and set out early for Buxton and had a nice couple of hours with Alistair, Julie, Ewan and Tom before taking them to the Cheshire Cheese for lunch. Sadly, I thought the quality of the food had gone a little downhill (Pat's apple crumble wasn't properly cooked) and the prices had gone in the opposite direction: this was our third lunch there, and the total bills had been about £70, about £80 and about £90, for four adults and two kids.

We set out home straight from the pub and got home well before dusk. We only nibbled a little and decided to go to bed at 9pm as we were both pretty weary. It had been a hectic week with three drives to Sheffield and one to Buxton.

Oh yes: my feet had behaved quite well!

### **Sunday 12 November 2017**

We had a pretty unremarkable day-of-rest, getting up at about 9am. The long night has over-stressed Bailey who had done a big poo on the front hall carpet – only the second time he has done this since he came to live with us. Pat was dealing with this by the time I got downstairs, so I went for the paper and cooked the porridge (back to Scott's 'old-fashioned' oats at last!). Pat was in a baking mood.

We had two small lamb rump steaks in the freezer, so I fished out the leftover wedges to heat and crisp in the oven and cut up a pack of stringless green beans ready to boil.

## Monday 13 November 2017

I slept well with only three visits to the loo, and woke sharply to see that the time was 6:45am. I decided to get up straight away so we had an early start. It was a lovely morning with a temperature of around 4 degrees and only a light westerly wind. We had no face-to-face encounters so the walk was very enjoyable, taking 26 minutes to complete the usual route.

I went to Anton's with Pat again, this time armed with my heavy-duty stapler to fasten the carpet down at the top of his stairs. I showed him the stapler and tried to explain what I wanted to do, and he seemed to understand this and agree, so I went ahead and did it, but he then got very nasty with Pat, accusing her of being 'nosey' in *his house*. His hissy-fit went on for a while so Pat decided to leave. She was very upset after all we had done last week and after his care package had been re-specified with old friends to deliver it. He watched us depart, looking a bit puzzled.

We called in at Welbeck on the way home, had coffee and pastries at the café and bought meat and other bits in the wonderful Farm Shop. Then we had to stop at Sainsbury's for a few groceries, after which we dragged ourselves home.

Pat had a counselling session booked for either 3pm or 3:30, and foolishly left her mobile phone at home. This left me twitching, but she did get home without mishap. IT is amazing how dependent we are on our technology now!

Aidan came over for dinner, and I cooked three fantastic rib-eye steaks from Welbeck – the best we have had for ages.

MY left foot was very sore after all this activity. I took two paracetamols and later rubbed a little Voltarol gel into it, which eased the pain to some extent. I still wasn't comfortable enough in bed to read for very long, but soon got off when I got my head down.

## Tuesday 14 November 2017

I was restless from around 6am onwards but must have dropped off because I snapped awake at 7:10. It was a gloomy-looking day, but mild at 9 degrees and dry with no wind. We had an uneventful walk, apart from the intrusion of a black cat which got Bailey immediately into serious attack mode and then vanished over a high fence. My feet and legs were rather sore after all yesterday's activities and I was really glad to get home and onto our lovely leather office chair.

They were a lot sorer after I had done the full bedroom-clean which I do a couple of times a year when I can work up the courage and the energy!

This begins with hauling the Sebo upright vacuum-cleaner, which looks as sleek and modern as any other current model but weighs far more than one expects, up the cast-iron spiral staircase, lifting it by its handgrip with just three bent fingers.

Then the heavy pine blanket box, about four feet long by two wide and eighteen inches high and full of bed-linen and towels, has to be moved as far as possible from our Tempur beds on a rich and luxurious carpet. The parts the box rests on are rough-sawn timber, to the ends have to be lifted in turn and swung towards the new position.

Once this is done, the quilt is folded and stacked on the linen basket, the fitted sheets and pillowcases are removed for washing. Now our heavy beds, each with its two big electric motors and gearboxes, have to be moved to the blanket box. This means lifting the foot end and dragging the head end feet, which are only a couple of centimetres in diameter, through the long and dense carpet pile, allowing them to be slid sideways on all four feet (more resistance from the carpet) until they meet the walls. This in turn allows me to vacuum all the floor I can't usually reach because it is under the beds.

Next, I lift the Sebo onto each bed before vacuuming the mattress lengthwise and across in the hope of capturing all housedust mites and their hyper-allergenic leavings. The beds are both pushed back into the middle of the room and the spaces at the side are vacced up to the bedside cabinets. The space vacated by the blanket box has been cleaned so that gets dragged back into place and the rest of the floor is cleaned.

As if that wasn't enough I now have the wrestle the clean fitted sheet and pillowcases on. Now you know why I only go through this routine a few times each year, and why the next step is a long, relaxing shower!

Following my latest AskMyGP session I got a call from Dr Ghaebi about my Naproxen prescription. He asked me to try to get by on one tablet a day but said I would be alright using Voltarol gel with this.

We had leftovers from last night's steak dinner tonight. After dinner the left foot really started hurting, and even the gel was slow to help. As usual, getting up and walking around helped, as did sitting on the office chair to type this.

Once in bed, I couldn't read for very long without the left foot getting seriously painful. I put another small blob of gel on where the pain was centred but this didn't do a lot of good. I sat on the side of the bed with the foot in its optimum position and the pain eased, so I decided to lie down. Lying on either side failed to quieten the pain down, so I got up and walked up and down the bedroom for a few minutes. This did relieve the pain and I must have managed to get off to sleep before it started again.

### **Wednesday 15 November 2017**

With the car due at the Ford dealer at 8am for a check of its various peculiar noises, I had difficulty deciding what time to get up. In the end I got out of bed, where I had been pain-free and blissfully comfortable in all positions, at 6:15. The pain started, but only as an ache covering the whole left foot, when I stood up, and by the time I got downstairs I was walking normally.

We did the usual walk in just under 26 minutes, and at 7:30 I took Pat a cup of tea and changed into my 'best' outfit. I was at the garage well before 8 o'clock and took one of the staff for a ride so he could hear the various noises that have been causing us so much worry. The main one was quickly diagnosed as a failing wheel bearing, but the others would need more research.

I drove home in a brand-new Focus. Unlike the VW I had as a courtesy car while the body repairs were being done recently, this had most of the same controls as our 11-year-old version. I had to get help to engage reverse, which they *had* changed, and the brakes were almost as viciously snatchy as the VW's, but otherwise it was mostly a very refined version of our own car.

The left foot was the nucleus of severe pain – the ache kind rather than the burning sort – by the time I got home, so I decided to take one of the now-optional Naproxen tablets after breakfast. The bad pain went on until I took my Reeboks off to get changed. I felt much better in the HiTec walking shoes with the laces left loose, and even better sitting on the office chair. This foot really is very strange!

The combination of the early start, the mild stress of managing an unfamiliar car and the pain left me feeling incredibly tired. The fact that I had consumed nothing calorific but the semi-skimmed milk in two cups of tea between bedtime last night and getting back from the garage might have been a factor, too!

I made an interesting discovery while making coffee: the left-foot pain is centred on the joint at the summit of the instep, which I now know is called the tarsometatarsal joint. In fact, each toe has one, and the culprit in my case is the one associated with the big toe. It seems that the arch of the instep of my left foot is naturally quite high,

but if the foot is flattened to the floor the pain in the joint is reduced immediately. I was barefoot in the kitchen, and even tried standing on the one leg, with balance assisted by my hand on the worktop, and there was no pain at all.. This explains why, when I have really bad pain, sitting with the foot flat on the floor and the lower leg precisely vertical gives me instant relief which is even better if I put my hands on the knee and lean on it. It also explains why, when sitting for a long time allows the pain to ramp up, standing up and walking immediately relieves it, and doing this in stockinged or bare feet makes the relief even greater.

So why does the pain develop as I am sitting 'normally'? It seems that the arch must be flexing and putting stress on the already-inflamed joint.

Having figured all this out I went hunting in my bedroom cupboard and found my ancient Dr Scholl foot-massage sandals. These are not the most comfortable footwear, but they do provide support. The arch is not allowed to flatten completely but cannot flex too much.

I also had a look for NHS podiatrists on Google and found half a dozen within easy reach of here. I will continue my experiments and maybe see if a podiatrist can help. The only alternative is to go back and see if Mr Milner can repair my fused ankle. Interestingly, ankle fusion (arthrodesis) is sometimes done without the metal rod but with several screws...

I had a call shortly after 5pm inviting me to collect the car. Once I had managed to find out how to start the courtesy car (it was not as much like ours as I had thought), I had my first drive of the year in the dark. I was surprised by another moder feature when I stopped at traffic lights and the engine stopped. Depressing the clutch started it again, as with the VW. When I got to the garage I needed to reverse and couldn't find out how to do it. It turned out that I had to lift a collar below the gear knob.

After the shock of the bill, it was a great relief to get back in our own car, which now felt and sounded normal. I had quite a battle in the rush-hour traffic – also a fairly unfamiliar experience these days – but got home quickly and easily. I didn't show Pat the bill.

Pat had made a splendid Moroccan soup-cum-stew, which went down very well.

I decided to leave my shoes and socks off and put the Scholls on before going to bed – barefoot is definitely not an option on the open ironwork of our spiral staircase! I had a bit of a battle as usual to control the pain while reading in bed but must have got off to sleep quite quickly. I have decided to stop logging my nocturnal pees, which probably meant that I got back to sleep more quickly after each trip to the loo.

### **Thursday 16 November 2017**

I got up at 6:45 this morning after catnapping since well before dawn, so Bailey and I got out for our walk well before 7:30. It was a dull, dry morning, mild at around 10 degrees, with just a hint of chilly wind from the south. My feet were feeling weary but we got round in about 25 minutes. The only disturbance was the blasted corgis going insane behind their gates as we passed: they actually run round in little circles while barking their stupid heads off! Unkindly, I suggest to Bailey that it would be good if they disappeared up their own exhausts! Bailey treated them with the contempt they deserved.

After breakfast I put everything that lives in the car back after emptying everything out to avoid false rattles when the garage staff were checking for the reported faults. That cleared the decks so that I could give the rooms with new carpet a good vaccing. This is nearly as hard work as it was on the bedroom carpet on Tuesday.

The foot was mildly painful all morning, so I gave it a basting with Voltarol gel and it eased almost completely while I sat on the office chair trying to figure out why Pat's

most recent purchases using PayPal had been charged to my account. This was particularly annoying as they were all Christmas presents for me! We eventually got her logged on as herself and made a note of her password, after which she transferred the payments to my PayPal account. Technology is such fun...

I spent the rest of the day in bare feet and had very little trouble with the pain. I did top up the gel a little once or twice just to deal with minor twinges. Bedtime was similar to recent nights, with me sitting up to read for ten or fifteen minutes before I had to put my feet on the floor to ease the pain. When I was ready to get my head down, I walked the length of the bedroom and en-suite, and I have no recollection of problems getting to sleep.

When I did wake up, before daybreak, I was really comfortable.

### **Friday 17 November 2017**

I got up at 6:55 after a spell of cat-napping to be greeted by a beautiful Autumn (or was it Winter?) morning with a clear sky and a temperature of just 2 degrees. The car had a thin coat of frost, so I changed back into my ski jacket and fished out some thin thermal gloves. I took these off to deal with Bailey's only poo and didn't bother to put them back on. Apart from what might have been a dangerous encounter with an aggressive grey Staffie the walk was uneventful and we finished in 24¾ minutes.

The feet were quite comfortable on the walk and over breakfast, but as soon as we sat down with a cup of tea the top of the left one started to ache. This got steadily worse, so I put some Voltarol gel. This eased it a little and then it got very bad again, so I got up for a little walk. Almost as soon as I was on my feet the pain went away almost completely, so I sat down in the office to do some admin on the computer and felt totally comfortable. This is quite ridiculous: the pain only seems to get really bad when I am sitting in an easy chair!

After lunch we took Bailey for his first ever professional grooming, a couple of villages to the north. We weren't sure how he would react to being left with a total stranger but it seemed that he handled it really well. We went a couple more miles up the road for Pat to visit a charity shop (which turned out not to be open!) and for me to visit our favourite butchers. From there we set out for home to wait for the call to say that the dog was ready for collection. He had behaved really well, but was ecstatic to see us when we arrived. He was smooth and glossy and smelled very nice indeed. Apparently he had coped with everything, including having his claws trimmed, but had not like the bath very much.

When we got home Pat discovered that she had left her handbag at the grooming service, so I had to head back north and collect it.

My problem foot teased and tantalised me with intermittent severe pain and reasonable comfort. It settled fairly well during the evening with careful positioning, but once again it limited my reading time in bed, which was split 50/50 between sitting up in bed and sitting on the edge with my feet on the floor.

In the middle of all this it occurred to me that I had not tried one of my ProSport ankle supports recently. I decided to do this in the morning, because by the end of the day the left ankle is severely swollen and the swelling is very hard. The right one doesn't look much better but it doesn't hurt much in spite of the horrendous position of the ankle replacement.

### **Saturday 18 November 2017**

I managed a comfortable lie-in until 8:30 this morning, neither hurting much nor worrying about anything. I put the ProSport on my bare left foot and came down in the Scholl sandals, and by the time I had laid the table for breakfast there was still no pain. The sandals are starting to feel more comfortable.

Updated 13:56 24/1/20

By the middle of a lazy morning in front of the TV the ProSport began to feel less comfortable. The junction of the shin and the instep was getting core, so I took the support off and reverted to bare feet. I gave the foot a light rub of Voltarol gel and it felt reasonable until I got up to start preparing some bits for our dinner of pig's liver, really good bacon from the Welbeck farm shop, mash and onion gravy.

By about 1:30pm, after about an hour working barefoot on the cold kitchen tiles with no pain whatsoever, I was ready to relax with some good tennis, but when the programme came on at 2pm I realised that the pain was increasing rapidly. I quick rub of Voltarol eased it, but I knew I wouldn't be able to settle down, so I went back to the kitchen to clear the stuff off the drainer. As usual, the short walk and the change of position dealt with the pain, so I decided to have a short spell on the lovely office chair and write this update. I could hear Federer and Goffin starting. Time to head back into the sitting-room...

Bailey was snoozing comfortably on my big, soft, leather recliner, so I decided to take Pat's seat at the right-hand end of the three-seater. The position was much more upright than in my chair, keeping the lower leg completely vertical. I sat there for an hour without any pain at all. Oddly, when I took a loo break and sat down on the office chair to type this there was a hint of pain on the top of the left instep!

I went back for a while and at 4:30pm I still had no pain. I sat in my chair briefly, but not long enough for new pain to start. Then I got embroiled in other things and was fairly pain-free until I had cooked and we had eaten our dinner, ending with washing-up and about 6:30.

The real surprise was that, after returning to my usual place in the recliner and mostly resting the left foot on its outside edge, I had no real pain all evening. Even better: when I sat up to read in bed I was not interrupted by pain at all – I chose when to get my head down, rather than the blasted foot choosing *for* me after five or ten minutes! I was able to enjoy around half an hour's reading!

## **Sunday 19 November 2017**

I got up after 9am this morning. I went and got the Sunday paper and Anton's essentials and then tried to download *The Observer*, which has been getting steadily more difficult for quite a few weeks. I don't know if my dear old Kindle is getting a bit worn, or what, but I restarted it, which involves holding the power button on until the screen clears and then the maching slowly gets its act together. This happens at about the time I have decided that it isn't going to happen! Once I had gone through this dreary routine I was able to buy my paper fairly easily.

After breakfast Pat needed to get some baking done as she is caterer-in-chief for her girls' three-night stay outside Glasgow. She needed a few bits that had got missed from shopping, and I wanted to get red wine and coffee, so I put my Reebok trainers on and set out for Aldi. With quite a short list, but because I hadn't been to Aldi lately, I ended up with my small trolley overflowing and a bioll for just of £70.

By the time we settled down for coffee the left foot was rather sore on top but nothing like as painful as it has been lately. I had given it a modest rub of gel before I went out, which must have helped.

I have just seen the footer on this page. My diary has topped an amazing 500 pages!

The left foot became more painful during the afternoon, which I spent mostly sitting in my recliner, and by shortly after 5pm I felt as if someone was pushing nails into the top of the instep. I went for a barefoot stroll and within minutes the pain was receding rapidly. I remain totally baffled by all this!

Early in the afternoon, remembering the 2-degree temperature this morning, I went out to the wood-shed and split a few logs to add to the ones left in the log-basket. It



was good to be swinging my full-size felling axe again to turn the odd offcuts from our supplier's sawmill into a mix of logs and kindling. By 5pm the heat being thrown out by our wood-burner was amazing – especially with the door open.

We had planned to have lamb steaks with mash and gravy tonight but in the end we opted for a cheese and cooked-meat picnic – lazy but enjoyable.

The feet behaved fairly well through the evening, which went on longer than usual as we had the two-hour final episode of the BBC4 Spanish thriller, *I Know Who You Are*, to get through.

## **Monday 20 November 2017**

I managed to get a decent read in bed again last night after the left foot had behaved fairly well through the evening.

I got up at 6:50 on a dull, drab morning. It had rained through the night but this had stopped by the time I got downstairs. We had a bit of a panic because I couldn't find Bailey's magic anti-pulling harness. Luckily Pat was up early and reminded me that we had taken him to the groomer's on Friday (end of page 500 coming up!), so it might be in the car. It was.

We did our usual route in 25¼ minutes. My legs and feet felt weary and aching, but the pains were really quite mild. It was uneventful until we were almost home when I spotted a distant neighbour walking his black Lab, Chazzer, towards us. He opted to cross the road but Bailey really wanted to get at him and nearly dragged me into the traffic.

This was to be the first Monday for quite a while with Pat going to Anton's alone, so I had to decide how to spend my free morning. We decided together that because Pat would be away for three nights we could skip the Monday bed-changing routine, which was a welcome let-off for me.

At about 10am, after Pat had set out to Anton's, I was doing a bit of basic cooking to help her finish the meals she will be taking to Scotland – boiling 500 grams of Uncle Ben's excellent long-grain rice and, late, *peeling* a kilo of small new potatoes (I know, but the recipe said to peel them!). I was in stockinged feet on the cold, hard kitchen tiles and suddenly I got a sharp twinge of pain in the top of the *right* foot – the one that has been behaving quite well while the left one had been giving me all the trouble. This pain was on the top of the instep, but whereas the left-foot pain was focussed on the big-toe side of the foot this was concentrated towards the little-toe side. It eased after a few minutes, thankfully.

Between us we got everything sorted for Pat's four-day holiday, and for dinner I cooked two big lamb steaks which had a lot of nice lean meat separated into sections by areas of fat and gristle. These were served with leftover mash and onion gravy, and Birds Eye *petits pois*.

During the evening, unsurprisingly after lots of kitchen action, the feet were less comfortable than they had been, and I had real difficulty settling down to sleep, needing to rub extra gel in and take at least two strolls around the bedroom. Having forgotten to take my evening pill I was up to pee quite a few times through the night, but the feet didn't stop me getting back to sleep fairly quickly.

## **Tuesday 21 November 2017**

At around 6:45 I was just pondering whether to get up when Pat beat me to it. She had lots to pack and organise so as to be ready for Sue and John picking her up to take her across to Steph's. I did an early version of my usual routine and took Bailey out of her way.

On the way back we had what could have been a really nasty episode with Sodding Stanley. I had checked down one of the *culs-d-sac* and seen nothing untoward, but as we got back onto the footpath Bailey suddenly went bananas. He literally tore the lead handle out of my unprepared right hand and shot off to where Standley, Louise and the owner were emerging from behind a vehicle. I chased Bailey as fast as I could and probably a lot faster than I should have done, but battle had been joined by the time I caught up. It looked like the play-fighting he used to have with our George when Ajidan brought him to visit, but much more violent. My faithful hound paid no attention to my angry orders and it looked as if the two alpha-male competitors were tearing each other to shreds. By the time I had grabbed the handle I expected to see blood, but when I used my entire 14 stone to haul Bailey away there was no visible damage. I had to drag him 20 yards or more before he settled down. Stanley's owner remarked that the two used to be friends, but I said that was only when Stanley was off the lead and chasing his training ball. I checked Bailey when we got home but he didn't seem to be any the worse for the encounter.

Against my express demand, Pat had brought all her luggage downstairs unaided. I knew she would, stubborn creature that she is. We got all the food packed up and had breakfast before Sue and John arrived at 8:45. Heaven only knew how all her stuff was going to fit in Steph's new little hybrid with four ladies, but that – thankfully – was not my problem.

Once she was off I did my requested chores, including watering the indoor plants and getting the green bin out for collection, had another cup of tea and settled down to write this. Then I went into Amazon Video and, without much hope, decided to search for one of my all-time favourite movies, *The Lion in Winter*. To my surprise it was available, and in high-definition and wide screen, I watched the whole thing in one sitting. O'Toole and Hepburn were magnificent. I am pretty sure that the version I watched was much longer, at over 3 hours, than the one I have on DVD.

Shortly after the film ended the window-cleaners arrived, and as we wanted the insides of the conservatory windows done for Christmas I had to rearrange everything in there and then put it all back when they were finished. I had cheese and charcuterie for lunch and watch the BBC documentary I had missed about the Balfour Declaration and the origin and development of the Israeli and Palestinian state – a colossal political and diplomatic cockup that explains all the subsequent horrors. I prepared the big chicken I had bought to last the week with butter, garlic, lemon and herbs. Then I switched the oven on to see if I could get the rubbish fan working steadily.

It did work alright and I roasted my big chicken following Simon Hopkinson's classic recipe, but I honestly didn't enjoy it very much. It was rather watery and the flavour was bland – very disappointing, and not the first supermarket chicken I have cooked lately that failed to impress.

The house felt strange without Pat, but I continued to enjoy my viewing freedom, watching *Mystic River*, based on a novel by Dennis Lehane, one of my favourite crime writers for a long time but neglected more recently, followed by the full-length movie version of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* with Gary Oldman as a very credible George Smiley, supported by a very impressive cast. By the time I got to bed it was 1am – a very late bedtime for me lately, having got into a really monotonous routine. Pat and I exchanged a few texts until I got my head down.

### **Wednesday 22 November 2017**

I gave myself an extra hour in bed to compensate for my late night, but didn't relax very well. I made tea, fed Bailey, had breakfast and oscillated between BBC News and Radio 4 until 9am. Then I sprung my surprise for Bailey, who hadn't shown much sign of missing his walk. I dealt with my paranoia about losing the doorkey by

clipping on the extending steel cord and ring which I use for every local outing when Pat is at home and zipping the ring with the doorkey that lives permanently in the hall into one of my fleece's pockets. After breakfast rather than before, we had a fairly uneventful walk to the end of Long Lane – the very long lane on which we live (and my second of the name because I lived on Long Lane, Hillingdon from the age of 16 until I got my little flat in Hampstead) – and back again. My feet and legs felt sore and weary but we managed the distance in a whisker under 29 minutes.

After catching up on bits of admin I had a much-needed shower and shave before deciding on the morning's entertainment. On Amazon I found the entire *Pirates of the Caribbean* series of movies and picked one I hadn't seen at random. This took me through to my light lunch, leaving half an hour still to watch.

The feet had been very painful more-or-less since I got back from the walk, and I didn't get much relief until I remembered the trick of sitting on the edge of the chair with the foot flat on the floor and the lower leg exactly vertical. The right foot had continued its new kind of pain, but quite mildly. I repeated the manoeuvre each time the foot began to hurt as the afternoon passed, but by about 4:30 it wasn't working as well as it had. A little walkaround helped, as did a modest blob of gel (about the size of a large pea) when the pain became really intense. I was watching a TV documentary series about the Le Mans 24-hour race on Amazon, but stopped this at around 4:45.

My concern now was to do something with the disappointing chicken. I wanted to use the breast meat for a curry but found that we had no curry sauces, so I would have to walk across to the OneStop shop. I hoped that the wings and legs might still provide meat I could enjoy cold with Branston pickle and perhaps some friend potatoes. The walk across to the precinct was easy, with my strides quite long and comfortable. There was no Patak's Jalfrezi, so I got a jar each of Balti and Tikka Masala.

When I had stripped the chicken carcass, cubed the breast meat and mixed it with the jar of Tikka Masala sauce, I put it on to warm and started a generous pan of Uncle Ben's rice cooking – generous so that there will be plenty of rice left over to take to Anton's on Monday with the leftover curry. The rest of the meat was covered with foil on a plate and refrigerated. I also set the remains of the chicken carcass to boil in plenty of water to make stock.

To my disgust, I didn't enjoy the curry at all, and the cold offcuts were rather dry. Either I am losing the knack of roasting chickens, which I love, or the chickens in the supermarkets are nowhere near as good as they used to be. More generally I really am losing interest in eating.

I had a good evening finishing the Le Mans series and then having a look at one or two other things on Amazon. I was in bed by 11 and read comfortably for quite a while.

### **Thursday 23 November 2017**

I got up shortly before 8 o'clock having had a good night's sleep despite visiting the loo several times. The Tamsulosin doesn't seem to be doing much good. It was a beautiful morning, clear and sunny and only two or three degrees above freezing.

I emptied the dishwasher, set up for my usual breakfast and sat down with a cuppa until the end of the 9 o'clock news, all about the reptilian Hammond's budget and the reactions to it.

The walk *down* Long Lane was pretty boring yesterday so I decided to go up and on down the village's main street, the A60 to Doncaster, where there are wide grass verges almost all the way to the primary school attended by stepsons Aidan and Alistair many years ago, which I am glad to say is still a Nottinghamshire County

Council school, until the village's other school, onto whose play area our garden backs and which is a bloody academy with a 'Principal' (no letters after the name!) instead of a Head Teacher, a pretension I find deeply offensive as someone who worked my socks off for two years to qualify as a teacher and proudly for years in the the state education system.

The watch read almost spot-on 15 minutes when we turned round and in spite of the uphill stretch on the way back it read just 30 minutes 40 seconds when we got back to the gate. There was a shortage of bins on this walk, so I had to carry Bailey's bag through the house and went on to do a quick patrol of the lawn on the way to the dustbin.

I spent the morning pottering with all sorts of things, including laying the fire ready for Pat coming home tomorrow and putting our friend Steph's address in the satnav in case I go across to collect Pat and Sue tomorrow afternoon or evening. In between I dug out a couple of video recordings I did from the BBCV Proms season quite a few years ago and treated myself to Beethoven's 7<sup>th</sup> ('Emperor') and 8<sup>th</sup> symphonies. I don't know the 8<sup>th</sup>, but it didn't light my candle the way the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> do. The 7<sup>th</sup> particularly was a galloping performance by the Eastern Westerns Divan Youth Orchestra (not so young, but wow!), to which I sang along at the top of my voice. I haven't listened to any Beethoven for ages and he always blows my socks off when I do.

With very cold weather forecast for tomorrow I decided to lay the paper and kindling ready in the stove, and managed to find a reasonably full can of lighter-gas to get the two lighters I use for lighting it topped up.

With my interest in food really wilting and the cold chicken really unimpressive, I planned maybe a two-egg omelette for dinner. I think the dog can have some of the cold meat with his dinner-out-of-a-can!

I have had odd spells of pain in the left foot through the day, mostly when sitting, but these have mostly been dealt with by placing the leg carefully while sitting and walking around the house withn stockinged feet – no gel or painkillers.

I watched Part 1 of *The White Princess*, recorded from the Drama channel this afternoon. This was followed by Part 2. This is an adaptaion of the Philippa Gregory novels I was reading a few years ago, apparently made by the Drama channel which is part of UKTV. The dramatisation was reasonable so I will probably follow the series through.

I had no appetite whatever for dinner, so I made a bacon and cheese omelette which I ate without much enjoyment – or dessert. I don't know what has happened to my inner foodie.

I watched a couple more episodes of *Goliath* before returing and having a decent read before getting my head down.

## **Friday 24 November 2017**

I had a nice lazy lie-in, ignoring the time, and got up because I was ready at 7:45. Bailey and I had breakfast before going for our walk, just for the guilty pleasure of breaking our long-established pattern.

It was a lovely morning with a clear blue sky, a low and very bright sun which made the second half of our walk quite difficult. We walked up the lane as we had yesterday but when up the main road instead of down and branched off into the council estate, taking quite a tortuous route home and clocking 34 minutes 13 seconds, nearly four minyes longer than yesterday, and I could feel the difference in my legs and feet.

The good news about my inner foodie was that I had lost 1¼ pounds since last week

Pat was due home today (she texted at 10am to tell me they had just set off on snowy roads), so I vacced around downstairs with the little Vax cleaner and ran the mop over the bathroom floor. I also took a bit more trouble making the bed, then wiped the kitchen surfaces and the hob. I prepared potatoes for wedges and ensured that the box of wings was well defrosted and in the fridge. Once all this was done I watched two more episodes of *Goliath* and set a roll in the sun to defrost for lunch. I opened the conservatory doors to give the sitting room the benefit of the solar ener

I didn't hear anything else from Pat until I got a text to say that Steph was dropping everyone home and expected to reach our place at about 5pm. That let me off driving over to Kiveton Park to collect Pat, for which I had programmed Steph's address into the satnav on Thursday. Let off the hook, I laid and lit the fire, so by the time they got here the sittingroom was really cosy with a welcoming glow in the stove's windows.

I really do seem to have lost it in the kitchen – or the big oven is really playing games. I switched it on in plenty of time for dinner, prodding the fan at the back with a skewer until it settled to steady rotation. The result was disappointing. Set at 230°C, it totally failed to brown my parboiled and well-oiled potato wedges, so I put them under the grill which scorched them. The chicken skin would not crisp so I cooked the wings too long and they ended up tough and dry, a bit like Tuesday's whole roast bird. Seriously cheesed off, I could hardly be bothered to eat anything. I have been producing excellent roast chicken to Simon Hopkinson's recipe for several years, as I did on Tuesday, and wings to my own recipe for months, and suddenly it has all gone wrong. Is it the chicken, the oven or the poor bloody cook?

It was really good to have Pat back home. I had been looking forward to a few days alone but I didn't seem to have handled them at all well. With the pain in my feet I had become unpleasantly aware that my body was beginning to let me down, as were my eyes, and I had been brooding on this quite a lot. The arrhythmias had continued through the week, too, which was rather scary.

### **Saturday 25 November 2017**

We both stayed in bed until well after 8am. I came awake in the middle of two quite vivid naturalistic dreams, both totally realistic and completely stupid but I can only remember one bit of one of them! We did nothing particularly demanding, and I was taken off active duty by the Formula 1 qualifying, live from Abu Dhabi.

Pat had a very long phone-call from her sister Jackie, talking for a long time about her son Nick's problems, and this was followed immediately by an equally long call from Alistair whose own emotional problems seem to be recurring after a fairly reasonable spell.

Later on we settled down to watch some good TV and later still we joined forces to produce a tasty mushroom Stroganoff, which for me was the most enjoyable meal pof the week.

I discovered that the new French thriller, *Witnesses*, being broadcast on BBC4 from 9pm was series 2. I couldn't find series 1 on the iPlayer but I did find it on Amazon, so we decided to record series 2 and watch the first one first.

To my amazement, the left ankle never got really painful at all, for which I was really grateful. I needed no Voltarol and just sensible management of the leg position when sitting.

### **Sunday 26 November 2017**

This morning was fairly hectic as I had decided to do our beds today rather than tomorrow. It wasn't a crazy bed-moving exercise like the last one but I did want ot vac

the mattresses and the floor with the little cordless Vax. It was also an overdue duvet-cover changing day. So I got this lot done straight after breakfast and then grabbed a quick shower before going downstairs to lay and light the fire. I suppose I should have had the shower *after* that but it didn't occur to me.

Before all that I did a brisk walk across to the shops to pick up the paper, some milk and Anton's fags, which I managed with no discomfort whatever.

I used a screwed-up page of newspaper to rub the ashes through the grate and then vacced the hearth and the surrounding carpet. I needed to split enough logs to fill the basket and lit the fire so went out to the wood-shed to do this. It was nice to have the rosy glow of the fire by coffee time.

Most of the rest of the day was dedicated to the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, which lacked excitement but yielded a satisfactory result.

Again, the troublesome foot didn't give me any real grief at all, even when I was swinging my felling axe and lugging heavy baskets of logs through the house. It was only when I had been sitting in front of the TV for a while that it began to ache, but the pain was nowhere near as bad as it has been on many evenings.

### **Monday 27 November 2017**

I have decided to walk Bailey after breakfast, at least until we get back to spring/summer times and weather, so I treated myself to a lie-in until 7:30 this morning – that early because Pat has to get off to Anton's quite early, but on other days I may stay in bed until 8am! I had time to consider how my chest felt, and it felt pretty good. I had been up for quite a few visits to the loo (unlogged now!) and my feet and ankles had felt very stiff and achey every time, but once I was on the move they eased out.

Straight after breakfast I went across to the surgery to book an appointment with a GP and another with a nurse to do my routine annual blood tests. I spoke to a receptionist in an empty waiting room about 15 minutes after opening time, which was quite strange. She explained that she was not authorised to book GP appointments. It now has to be done by a duty doctor, reached using the AskMyGP section of the practice website which I have used a couple of times lately. This makes sense when I think about it, because there must be a lot of people who just book an appointment which turns out to have been unnecessary. This way you get to talk to a doctor who takes notes and decides whether you need a face-to-face consultation or not before bunging up the surgeries. I was delighted that this morning's duty doctor was Dr Greenwood, whom I have seen several times. He has always been a good listener and very thorough. So as I wrote this I was waiting for him to call me. The dog's walk will have to wait, which isn't a bad thing because it has just started raining!

I opted to have a form for the blood tests printed on the spot so I could take it to our local hospital where you get seen by the full-time phlebotomists within about ten minutes and they do a faster and less painful job than our lovely practice general nurses.

When Dr Greenwood called and I explained the problems he wanted to see me straight away, so I went back to the surgery and he gave me a fairly thorough cardiovascular check. He got me an appointment at another of the practice's surgeries for an ECG tomorrow morning and referred me to the hospital for a few other tests.

When I got back I had a call from Pat from Anton's, so I had to go information-hunting for her. Eventually I managed to get settled down for coffee and at around 11:30 I got Bailey out for a walk lasting about 22½ minutes, during which the rain started again and we both got pretty wet. I didn't much mind and Bailey loved it.

Once I had towelled both of us down I took my shoes off. My feet felt appalling on the hard kitchen floor – like sacks of rocks. The temperature was forecast to drop as low as 5 degrees, so the fire would be good, but whether I would manage to get out and split logs remained to be seen.

The weather was kind, brightening and warming enough for me to get out and fill two baskets of carefully split logs. I am getting quite professional with my big felling axe. I am also getting a little concerned that the pile containing about half of last year's consignment of wood is running down rather quickly. There is at least double that pile's original size along the back of the shed but I doubt if that will keep us going right through the winter.

Pat came home quite exhausted after a difficult morning with Anton and Rachael, the head of the company which will be taking over from the current carers on the 6 December. She is an old friend from way back but they had to go over an awful lot of stuff together, so we spent the afternoon watching the rest of the French thriller *Witnesses*. Among other things she reported that 'Anton's fridge' had been working all morning (actually our old garage fridge which we gave him some months ago because the *actual* 'Anton's fridge' had totally popped its clogs, and the very one that was left for us when we bought the house).. I remembered that the garage fridge worked a bit erratically, stopping but allowing me to restart it by twiddling the thermostat knob. We would bring the poor old thing home on Wednesday and see if it would work for us – long enough, anyway, to provide cold drinks for Christmas.

My only regular reader has emailed me from the USA to say I had got this week's date headers mixed up. These have now been corrected! Thanks, Ken!

## **Tuesday 28 November 2017**

I had an appalling night. Up for my second pee at about 3:15 and the second at about 4:30. After the first I started thinking about all the issues affecting Pat and all my tricks for getting back to sleep didn't dig me out of the morass. After the second Pat was awake and we lay there pondering what we should do. Eventually she went off to sleep and I started trying a mindfulness technique I had heard about: focus totally on breathing and maintain a precise pattern. I started breathing in-two-three-four and out-two-three-four, trying to concentrate on maintaining the rhythm and this did seem to keep all the other rubbish intruding. I must have got off eventually and woke in time to get up at 7:30.

While I waited for Pat, I put Bailey's flea-and-tick stuff on, emptied the redundant stockpot into a bag and then into the bin, took the bin out to empty that, followed by the recycling bag, all to distract me.

I had an appointment at 9:40 for an ECG following my session with the doctor yesterday, so I went back up to change once I heard Pat on the move and laid the table for breakfast.

I got to the surgery early and collected my letter detailing my Friday hospital appointment. I was called fairly quickly and met a tall and delightfully friendly nurse-practitioner called Jo. My chest felt tight I might reveal something nasty. Nevertheless, we had a thoroughly pleasant chat while she fixed sticky electrodes to different bits of me and then ran the machine. I couldn't see the trace but when it was finished she said everything looked pretty normal. Then she took it through to be checked by one of the Gps who confirmed that there was nothing untoward. The trace would be sent down the road to Dr Greenwood, who would probably get in touch – though my Friday morning in the Chest Pain might reveal much more.

I spent some time before lunch splitting logs, emptying the ashes from the stove, cleaning up around it and laying this afternoon's fire. I then ran the little Vax vac round, beginning with the hearth and ending in the kitchen.

My major task for the rest of the afternoon was to make sure the space in the garage where the fridge lived before we gave it to Anton was still big enough. In fact, it wasn't because a few things had got shuffled around, so I shuffled them some more to give me a space wider than 600mm and swept it out, ready for the old fridge's homecoming. I also folded Pat's bag trolley and put it in the hall for tomorrow's lifting and shifting.

My feet and lower legs felt really weary and painful this afternoon so I had to excuse myself from walking duty. I felt quite guilty, but Bailey didn't see too bothered!

Before dinner I stripped out the back of the car to accommodate the old garage fridge. It may not work at all when we get it back but it will be worth a try.

### **Wednesday 29 November 2017**

I had a terrific night's sleep last night, in spite of several visits to the loo after which I must have got off again really quickly. I got up for the last one just after 7:30, considered getting back into bed briefly and then stayed up. The feet were feeling pretty grim when I walked across the room, so I decided even before going downstairs to cancel the remainder of this week's walks.

We had a delivery window from 10am to 4pm for the delivery of Anton's fridge, so we had to be there at 10am. Once there I found a text message with a link that showed me a little map with his place and, at Barlborough – the halfway mark between us – with a little van shown. There was a delivery estimate no later than 11:50, but the van turned up at around 10:30. I had got his/our old fridge out of its slot, which Pat had then cleaned, and onto our little bag trolley. We bullied it out of the front door and I managed to wrestle it, with the new fridge's packaging for protection, into the back of the car. There was plenty of room because I had folded the back seats down.

We were told that the new fridge had to stand for eight hours to allow the refrigerant chemicals to soft themselves out in the pipes, and we had emphasised this as strongly as possible to Anton and left a note for his carer.

On the way home we called at TKMAXX for Pat to collect a 'click and collect' package, but it had not yet arrived. We did the same at our local Tesco and that package *had* arrived. Finally, very weary, we got home for a light lunch. I then had to get the old fridge out of the car and into its slot in the garage. I took all the removable bits out for washing and wiped down the inside with Dettol. I then washed the rest thoroughly and left them to drain, planning to leave the fridge to settle until about 6pm after a bumpy journey lying on its door. In the end I didn't bother and lefty switch-on for the morning.

### **Thursday 30 November 2017**

I got up at about 7:30 to a clear, bright sky and a temperature of just on zero.

As soon as breakfast was over I put the fridge back together – a rather disappointing task because the glass shelves were too narrow. The wire ones were okay, though. Then I switched the mains socket on and clicked the fridge's thermostat knob to 3. The light came on and I could just hear the refrigerant gurgling gently. I put the fridge thermometer in and left things to take their course.

Next, I converted the Focus back from van to car mode. Pat decided to pop up to the local Factory Shop so I took the time to buy three of her presents online.

I wore the HiTec walking shoes on top of compression knee-socks throughout these tasks and the feet felt really good. I began to wonder if I might manage a walk with poor Bailey. Judging from the crazy speed of his first run down the garden this morning, he needs to burn off some energy.



At 11 o'clock, while waiting for Pat to come back and after I had prepared our coffee (with added Not-Quite-Baileys), I went out to have a look at the fridge thermometer. It read -5 degrees – very satisfying for a fridge that came with the house when we bought it in 2005, was fairly well-aged then, and has been kept in a cold, damp garage since then and, more recently, bounced to Sheffield and back lying on its side in the back of our car! A quick Google told me the optimum temperature for a domestic fridge is between +3 and +5, so I turned the knob down from 3 to 2.

We will have plenty of chilling space for our extra Christmas drinks and other goodies again this year.

At about 11:20, after I had cleared the ashes, put the screwed-up balls of paper in and vacuumed the hearth and the stove door I called Pat's mobile and she said all was well and she wouldn't be long, but there was still no sign of her at 11:45 – women and shopping! Five minutes later, she arrived back, laden down with carrier bags.

I checked the fridge at around 1pm and turned the stat down to 1. On the way I looked out and saw very tiny snowflakes bouncing around in the wind. I went down to the shed for the snow shovel and back to the garage for my mountain boots. The flakes, if one could call them that, were a little bigger than pinheads, but better safe than sorry.

Towards 2:30pm I decided to try a walk with Bailey. The snow had started again but the flakes were sparse and very small. We did our usual start and went almost to the end of the football pitch, and then turned back seeing a really black sky ahead. We returned via the village hall and were home in just under 27 minutes. My legs and feet coped quite well but were glad of the respite. This was surprising because I had kept the walking shoes and compression socks all day.

I copped logs and built up the fire, and continued until we started watching Rizzoli and Co until I felt comfortable slipping the shoes off. By the time we had finished dinner, I was still pretty well pain free.

### **Friday 1 December 2017**

I had to get ready for 9:50 my appointment at the Bassetlaw Hospital Cardio clinic, so I got up at 7:30. My feet felt really battered when I hit the carpet but by the time I had showered and put on my decent Reeboks with clean joggers and one of my posher polo shirts, they felt pretty good.

I gave myself about 45 minutes to get to the hospital, park and find the clinic. There was quite a bit of waiting around but then a nice specialist nurse took me away for all the routine stuff. I then had to wait quite a while for my second ECG of the week, taken by another equally nice nurse. The good news was that nobody seemed very worried about my condition – not as worried as I have been, at least! I am expecting to be called back to do a treadmill test and other stuff fairly soon.

It was a very long walk to the outpatient clinic where I needed blood tests ordered by the GP and some more ordered by Julie, but my legs and feet handled it quite well. The phlebotomists were their usual super-rapid selves. Mine got her needle into the elusive vein in the crook of my left elbow in a time and a way that our practice nurses would never have managed, bless them! It did hurt a little when she was digging about, but nothing serious. She got no less than six vials of my deep-red blood from the one puncture.

We spent most of the rest of the day moving all sorts of stuff around the house in preparation for the frighteningly imminent festive season, and taking in the fruits of our recent online shopping.

In the afternoon I decided to try an experiment with web browsers. I have been using *SeaMonkey* for quite a while but I recently came up against a problem with the new web facilities from our GP practice: certain functions would not work with this browser. I have kept Microsoft's old workhorse *Internet Explorer* functioning, but it is painfully slow and probably accounts for some of the shortage of storage capacity on this small PC. *Windows 10* comes with a browser called *Edge* which I have never really tried. I decided to make it the default browser on my account and found it pretty slick. The next and slightly scary move will be to uninstall *Explorer*...

By tea-time we were quite weary so we watched the final few episodes of *Rizzoli & Isles*, which we will really miss, followed by some more of *Bosch*, which is also rapidly running out.

When I was ready to go to sleep the left foot decided to make this really hard for me. I had to use plenty of Voltarol gel, take several walks round the bedroom and sit reading with my feet on the floor before I could calm it down so that I had some hope of sleeping.

### **Saturday 2 December 2017**

We had a lazy start with tea in bed, after a surprisingly good night's sleep for me. After breakfast porridge we decided to do some of the shopping I had been planning.

I especially wanted to get some FeverTree Elderflower Tonics for Pat (something she had tasted in the Cheshire Cheese in Buxton when we took Alistair's gang there for lunch) and some fish, a thing Morrisons have always seemed to do better than any of the other big supermarket chains.

I also wanted to visit some charity shops in town to get good Christmas cards at sensible prices, with the profits going somewhere sensible, rather than paying the exorbitant prices charged by WH Smith and Clintons and letting the profit go in greedy shareholders' pockets.

We managed to fill a large trolley so full that I could hardly move it, and several big woven plastic shopping bags so completely that I could literally only just lift them! We found the tonic water and a salmon tail fillet plus some raw king prawns. This visit cost my Visa something over £180. The visit to town was a lot less expensive, even though we did buy some nice food from M&S. We did the full length of the main shopping street, which I managed with no real grief. The feet, in the good Reeboks, coped with that as well as they did the long-distance walks from one end of the hospital and back yesterday.

As anticipated, once I sat down with coffee at home, after unloading the car and getting everything stashed the left foot decided to start giving me grief again.

We ate king prawns (Morrisons) in garlic butter followed by Coquille St-Jacques (M&S) for dinner, and I followed those with the remains of last weekend's creamy rice pudding, 'let down' with more cream and bramble jelly. Lovely! The foot behaved well through the evening – amazing after all the hard work it has done with my hospital visit yesterday and all the shopping today!

### **Sunday 3 December 2017**

A surprisingly mild day today after all the very cold ones we have had lately. Pat had to get started on her Christmas cakes and had no jobs I could usefully do, so I managed to read my Kindle *Observer* pretty well from cover to cover. The only short break was a four-bag poo patrol in the garden – Bailey really had been busy.

He has been in a strange mood since last night when he didn't want to go out. When Pat went down before me she couldn't persuade him to go out but when I went down he did. He seemed to be sniffing around a lot, peeing in several places – scent-

marking? - but flatly refusing to follow me onto the grass, even once I had bagged up his many offerings. We can only assume that some creature, perhaps a cat, has been in the garden and left its own scent marks. If so, I would have expected him to be angry rather than frightened.

Pat had a very long telephone conversation with Alistair, who is going through another very difficult patch, perhaps somehow stirred up by the problem he had with his parathyroid a few months ago. We are both very concerned for him.

My flirtation with the *Edge* browser has become frustrating. It seems to lack so many of the functions I expect (print, save etc) that it really isn't a contender. I think I will have to go back to one of the others. *IE* is a total non-runner, as it is excruciatingly slow. *SeaMonkey* it will have to be, I think. Pat will probably be fine with *Edge* and liked the look of it when I demonstrated it to her this morning, so I will leave it as her default.

A few minutes after writing the last paragraph I had downloaded *SeaMonkey*, installed it and set it as my default browser again.

I went into the kitchen with a view to frying two tail fillets of salmon to serve with baby new potatoes and frozen peas, but we both decided we had no appetites, so I mixed us a gin and tonic each which we drank with crisps for me and French Fries for Pat, followed by two fresh mince pies for me and one for her. Dinner? I don't know what it going on with us! I will do the salmon tomorrow night...

The feet had been fairly comfortable all day but I was unable to sit up reading for very long once I was in bed (with my wonderful goose-down pillows freshly machine-washed and tumble-dried – sheer luxury!). It seems that the silly left foot just doesn't like being on the end of a horizontal leg with its toes pointed straight up. I had to resort to sitting on the edge of the bed with the lower leg vertical for five minutes.

### **Monday 4 December 2017**

I have decided to be a bit gentler with myself and get up later than I did when I was doing the longer, faster walks, so that there is at least some daylight when I get downstairs. However, I had a sleepless couple of hours from a little after 5am, concentrating on my rhythmic breathing but finding several things to worry about, and was quite happy to get up at 7:15

The iPhone said the temperature was 9 degrees when I got downstairs. I don't know where it gets its data, because it was chilly on the walk and our outside thermometer said it was only 5 degrees when we got back.

The feet were feeling quite good in the Scholls sandals when I got to the bottom of the iron spiral stairs, and felt just as good when I got my compression socks and the HiTec walking shoes on. They gave me no real trouble on the 19-minute walk which I had decided to do to ease myself back into the routine after only walking twice last week. Bad for Bailey but added to the mileage in the hospital on Friday and up and down the town on Saturday probably gave me a half-decent total.

We met the nice long-haired shepherd twice, because its owner was doing the same route as I was but in the opposite direction. The dogs were fine together, though I think the Shepherd felt a bit slighted at the second meeting when Bailey decided to fuss its mistress!

Pat got a text from Rachael, who runs the support services which will be looking after Anton from tomorrow onwards (see entry for the 6 November), to say that she would like to meet Pat at Anton's this morning, so she had a bit of a rush to get his 'food parcel' together but got off okay. Ominously, she took a big bag of cleaning materials, so I might not see her for quite a time.

Over coffee, I found a couple of episodes of a new season of *Vikings* on Amazon and watched the first, which covers the Danes' conquest of York, tying in well with the early parts of Bernard Cornwell's *The Last Kingdom*.

My mistake. On her way home, at about 12:15, Pat rang to say she would be calling in at Sainsbury's. I couldn't believe she was so early, but it seems Rachael hadn't stayed long and Anton wouldn't let her and her cleaning kit upstairs – he is funny that way. For myself, I was pleased: she really doesn't need to be doing housework in all his mess. I hope that, once he is working with Anton, Andy can get him back to doing some supported cleaning and tidying, though his vision is so bad now that I doubt if this will go very far. It might give Anton back a bit of self-respect, though...

Pat brought home some lovely sandwiches and cream cakes from Sainsbury's, so we had a luxury lunch before she started on her Christmas cakes. I helped out by stirring the wonderfully glutinous mix and researching EU standard egg sizes. In between, I found my tub of white grout in the garage and took it and a palette knife upstairs to make the Super Glue job I did on the broken loo cistern a week or so ago a bit less unsightly. When the grout was dry I took a kitchen scourer pad to it.

I did a bit of tidying in the garage and at the end went up the ladder to stow stuff in the garage loft. The result was two really painful feet, but the recovered reasonable well with some rest later.

In spite of having a pretty rich lunch, I decided that we should have the salmon, new potatoes and peas planned for last night. We had bought a salmon tail fillet at Morrisons on Saturday and the fish looked, felt and smelled really good.

## **Tuesday 5 December 2017**

I don't know if it was the sudden shocks my digestive system got from the rather luxurious sandwich and cream cakes at lunchtime or a proper meal yesterday evening or what, but I had a bit of a disaster at around midnight. I had got up for a pee, which I duly delivered, and then suddenly started feeling a little dizzy, with a moment of distorted vision in the near-darkness. I got myself sat down on the loo lid and suddenly realised that I had lost control of my bowels. What I produced was halfway to diarrhoea, but fortunatlet not liquid enough to run off the lid. I managed to get things under control with a few sheets of Andrex and was able to walk to the light switch without dripping on the carpet. A box of Andrex wet wipes and some light enabled me to clean up quite thoroughly, and after a few minutes I felt able to take myself back to bed. By this time Pat was awake and I had to explain what had happened.

When I woke up at about 8:15am I noticed some dark stains – not more than large spots really – on my bottom sheet, close to my freshly-washed pillow. I didn't think I would have sat that far up when getting back into bed, but investigating when I got up suggested that I had. The spots were definitely a colour typical of faeces. How embarrassing – getting old really isn't a deal of fun!

Surprisingly, when I went to the loo, what I produced was perfectly normal.

I blotted the stains with some kitchen roll which I keep for blowing my nose, and later in the morning I gave them a good rubbing with anti-bacterial spray, which took about half of the colour out of the sheet.

After all that, I couldn't face a walk. I did do a short visit to the Co-op to keep Pat's baking activities adequately resourced. I felt pretty exhausted at first but soon got myself back into working mode, struggling with the latest NHS Choices website, which is a million times less effective than its equivalent was when I was feeding it local data from Derbyshire. The service really has gone to pot. All I needed was to

identify the GP practice with which Anton is registered, but it took ages. I got it in the end, though, and relayed it to Rachael, his new care manager.

No sooner was that done and Pat had gone upstairs to get ready for her kidney function test at the GP's, than Alistair came on the phone and told her that he had finally decided that he couldn't carry on living with Julie. We agreed that he should come and live with us for a while, on a trial basis at least. We would be able to find him plenty to do. We will see...

Once we have dealt with Anton's hospital appointment tomorrow, we have only the family gathering at Sarah's new house in Peterborough on Sunday 17 December booked, leaving us a decent slice of uncommitted days to deal with Christmas.

Liver with mash, peas and onion gravy tonight. I might drop a bit of bacon in as well. Lamb's liver was unfortunately as I had expected. Even cooked lightly enough to leave the inside pink and red in places, it was tough and chewy – not a patch on the pig's we had a few weeks ago. Oh for calve's liver!

### **Wednesday 6 December 2017**

With the rush to get Anton to hospital there was no walk this morning.

We managed to get Anton to The Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield on time and I got a free place in the hospital's multi-storey disabled section free-of-charge with his disabled person's blue badge. It was a nightmare from the moment we went through the hospital entrance, though – absolutely jam-packed.

The doctors failed to persuade Anton to consent to surgery on his one working eye, in spite of telling him that he would lose his remaining vision far more quickly without it and the existing vision might improve. This was understandably frustrating and upsetting for Pat.

The one positive from the day was that we dropped in on Pat's sister Jackie and husband Bob, and they suggested getting fish and chips for lunch. Bab and I drove down to the famous Admiral chippie in their village and we shared two small haddock, chips and peas. Very nice.

### **Thursday 7 December 2017**

It was blowing and raining hard this morning and continued in this way for most of the day. I could even hear the rain lashing the double-glazed windows in the kitchen, so Bailey and I decided to forego our walk.

The feet were behaving fairly well until I sat down for my afternoon tea, when the top of the left one caught fire – or that was how it felt. The Voltarol gel didn't help much to begin with but eased it eventually. Pat was generating her delicious mince pies for most of the day. We had a couple each with tea and they were really good.

After lunchtime (no lunch) I split and brought in three baskets of logs, cut from the wood in the shed which had remained incredibly dry. I laid the fire and vacuumed around, but the temperature was still around 10 degrees by dinner time. The forecast is for it to be far colder tomorrow, when we are collecting Alistair. He is determined to separate from Julie, who spoke to Pat at length while I was out at the Co-op and sounded absolutely desolate.

Dinner tonight was natural smoked haddock with lovely leftover mash and petits pois, except that Pat had the kitchen so totally dedicated to mince pies – and what could be more appropriate? - and we never got round to cooking it! A nibble of some ancient Christmas cake and a bit of dried-up cheddar was enough for me. More than enough, in fact.

### **Friday 8 December 2017**

We had a fairly hairy drive to Buxton, because snow had fallen from Chesterfield westwards. I didn't realise this until I had rejected the route via Chesterfield itself and set off for Cutthorpe, our usual route. Nevertheless, we made it to the top of the hill in Buxton where Alistair lives – or did live until today. We loaded up his luggage and headed back – via Chesterfield, which was so congested that we might have been better going back the way we came. He was obviously relieved to have made this decisive move, and went across the road to buy himself a kebab dinner! Then he and Pat had the serious task of clearing all the Christmas stuff out of the front bedroom and moving Al in.

### **Monday 11 December 2017**

Alistair and I went to Aldi for wine, beers and a whole lot more on Sunday in *His New Car*, which he had found on the web and, with a good deal of juggling, bought for a mere £600: a sporty little Citroën C2. Apart from that there was nothing much to report.

My feet had stood up to everything through the weekend until I started reading in bed last night. Then they got their own back big time, with excruciating pain in the left foot that simply would not let me sit still. After several cycles of walking round the bedroom, sitting on the edge of the bed with the lower leg quite vertical and then getting back into bed and lying down. I must have gone off eventually because the next things I remember were a sense that I had slept right through and a loo visit at about 5:30 this morning.

Anton had to manage without Pat today because we were expecting Barney to be in hospital for his big heart op, but this was postponed once and then again later today – a real nightmare. Apparently there had been an outbreak of MRSA on the intensive care ward where he would have his recovery phase – very reassuring.

I got up at about 7:15 this morning. It was beautifully clear and fiercely cold at about -2 degrees, but Bailey and I managed a decent 20-minute walk, which the feet handled quite well.

Pat had already done a lot of baking. She needed sausage meat for sausage rolls, so we went to the Welbeck Estate where she spent ages choosing Christmas cards for close friends and family. I went to the Farm shop and bought sausages and streaky bacon for pigs-in-blankets, her sausage meat and some large pieces of our favourite cheeses. It is an indication of the quality of the Farm shop that this little lot set me back over £70! Much of this will be for Sunday when we are doing the annual pressie-swap tea after I persuaded my daughter Sarah, who was going to do it, that their long drawn-out moving-in to their new house was really going to make it difficult.

This afternoon was spent in the kitchen, with me making heaven-knows how many pigs-in-blankets and Pat doing mostly sausage rolls. Even our garage chest freezer is now pretty full.

Before that, though, I had to try to find out how Barney's other grandmother, Joyce, can change the train tickets booked to get her and Pat to Leeds when Barney is well enough for visitors. This proved rather complicated as the agency would not talk to me, but only to the 'account holder'. I had to email all the information and leave her to unravel it all.

### **Tuesday 12 December 2017**

Joyce managed to sort things out, but the hospital seemed to be having trouble sorting their problems out. It looks as if they will be going to Leeds on Thursday.

Bailey and I managed a walk this morning in a temperature of -3 degrees.

I spent a long time trying to reclaim space on the PC's drive C and eventually settled on some software that was using masses of space and uninstalled it. Now, rather than having no spare space at all, I have about a third of this miserable little 68.3GB drive free.

I have roughed out a menu for Sunday:

Melba toast plus maybe some French bread

Butter

Cheese board – Lincolnshire Poacher, Colston Basset Stilton, Kirkhams Lancashire, Mild Cheddar, St-Agur soft blue, Le Rustique Camembert

Cold meats platter – prosciutto, salami, chorizo, cooked ham etc

Seafood platter – salmon mousse, king prawns, mackerel terrine, Marie-Rose sauce

Sausage rolls

Pigs in blankets

Mince pies

Chocolate cake

French Fancies

Pat has agreed to make the Melba toast in spite of being very busy. She is baking the chocolate cakes as I write.

I will get a few bottles of Prosecco plus some good white wine to go with all this.

I need to get the ingredients for the salmon mousse, some top-quality tinned mackerel in olive oil and some king prawns. I will try to hit Sainsbury's early tomorrow. We found the little loaf tins in which I usually make the mousse after a long search of two cupboards, so I will be able to get one mousse for Sunday and another for Christmas dinner in the freezer tomorrow.

We got the news later on that Barney had finally been admitted to the hospital and booked for surgery tomorrow morning.

### **Wednesday 13 December 2017**

My plan – after a pleasant 20-minute walk with Bailey – was to get down to Sainsbury's early, buy all the stuff needed for Sunday and make the salmon mousses by lunchtime. It was slightly thwarted by the car refusing to start. When I turned the key in the ignition all I heard was a fast high-pitched rattle which sounded like a machine-gun. Luckily Alistair was here with his new car and was able to take me to Sainsbury's. I decided to stop at the Ford garage first and see if they could send someone to look at the car. After telling me that the situation was probably the sudden death of the battery, they checked my records and reminded me that my annual service charge includes a roadside assistance package called SARA – service [something] roadside assistance. They gave me the number and

as soon as we got home I called them and an AA man arrived well before midday. He confirmed the diagnosis, and for a charge of about £150 he fitted a new battery straight away.

Meanwhile, I had got the big Magimix food processor out (with a bit of a fight as its rubber feet had reacted with the varnish on the shelf and stuck solid!) and by the time he finished two salmon mousses were well on the way to completion. By 1pm they were clingfilmed and in the outside fridge and I had finished washing up all the fish-smelling tools and utensils.

Later I finished off the Christmas cards which still needed addressing and posting, and drove up to the Post Office in freezing rain.

Then we got a text from Aidan: *He's all done...spoke to surgeon...all went well, just waiting for him to arrive on intensive care ward.* Huge relief all round.

A little later a fully-detailed picture of all the tubes, cables and electronic gizmos attached to our poor grandson arrived via *WhatsApp*. Frightening – especially when magnified to full screen on the PC.

We decided that I should make the Melba toast for Sunday, so I taught myself and it didn't come out half badly. A little later I heated-up Pat's latest batch of Mary Berry's Malaysian chicken fried rice for dinner. Then I sorted my month's pills out and she went back to wrapping.

We watched Mary herself at Goodwood after a bit more sorting. We took Pat's dad Jim to The Goodwood Revival many years ago, and it was good to learn more about the estate and the March family – a really interesting bunch.

That was interrupted by amazing news of how quickly Barney was recovering. Pat was over the moon with the things Aidan told her. Her visit with Joyce looked like being on Friday – a chance for me to get the Christmas tree installed? However, in view of Barney's impressively quick recovery from the anaesthetic they decided to go tomorrow. There followed a long and complicated conversation as Joyce worked with her computer at the other end to get new train tickets. This seemed to be amazingly difficult, but she sorted it in the end. Alistair and I fought over the right to drive Pat to Meadowhall and I won.

Last job this evening in cold and wind-driven rain was to pop into the garage and take my salmon mousses out of the fridge, put each in a bag and find a bit of room for it in the chest freezer. Or I thought it was the last: Pat then asked me to bring something else in – I can't remember what – so it was coat on again!

The left foot started playing up after about 20 minutes in bed, but I seemed to get off fairly quickly.

### **Thursday 14 December 2017**

The wet and windy night had toned down by the time (7:30am) I got out of bed for the last time, and when I offered Bailey a trip out into the garden he refused. This suited me as I didn't really want a soggy walk before driving to Sheffield.

After a really silly discussion over whether Pat would take Barney three or five (my choice) bars of Aldi milk chocolate which she won, we left at just



on 9am. Traffic was surprisingly light and we got her to the upstairs entrance of the monstrous Meadowhall shopping mall in just 40 minutes. It took me slightly longer to get home because I got trapped in the wrong lane on the M1 junction and ended up heading north instead of south. Luckily there was a junction for Rotherham in only a mile or two. The drive back into the burning low sun was no fun at all but Bailey and I were soon relaxing over coffee (me) and biscuits (both). Alistair was out, having done some touching-up of the wallpaper and emulsion in the hall and taken the embarrassingly large haul of bottles and jars to the bottle bank. He wasn't back by the time we had coffee and had left no note, so this one man and his dog had the house to ourselves.

There was obviously masses to do before Sunday's little tea party, but a lot of it was clever wrapping to be done by Pat. I did take the light Vax upstairs to give our bedroom a really good going-over and then did all the downstairs except the conservatory because I didn't dare disturb any of her stuff. By the time I had finished the Vax was solid with dog hair, most of which I got out with my surgical forceps, but I was frustrated by not being able to detach the floorhead (the bit with the brush roller in it). Alistair managed by the careful application of more strength that I have left, so now every piece that can be washed has been washed. Shortly before 2pm I was satisfied that the filters were dry and put the device back together.

Then I mopped the Karndean flooring in the bathroom with the recommended cleanser. I used rather more than I had before and it dried slowly and left a nice matt finish. To my relief, the TumbleTwist mats didn't slide around so much every time my foot disturbed them!

It took quite a bit of calculating for me to decide how soon I needed to get to Meadowhall to get Pat home after her day with Barney. In the end I set out early on the basis that I could read my Kindle just as well in the car as in the sitting-room. Again, the traffic was a nightmare, but I got onto the upper parking deck fairly easily and managed to park very close to the main entrance. I tried texting Pat to arrange a rendezvous but the messages failed. Then I got inside and tried phoning Joyce, but her phone was obviously switched to voicemail. I left two messages but nothing happened. While I waited for some sort of response I called Pat's phone and it was answered by Aidan: she had left it on Barney's bed! Just as I was getting serious concerned I got a call from Joyce. We managed to rendezvous and it turned out that, among the 3 thousands of vehicles, her car was parked *just two spaces from ours* = incredible! Getting out of Meadowhall was a nightmare, but when we finally got onto the M1 South sliproad everything opened up and we had a decent drive home in the darkness and the rain.

Barney was still quite poorly but was keeping his pecker up.

We each improvised our own meal – Al to the kebab shop, Pat with Shredded Wheat and me with the last leavings of the Chicken Fried Rice.

My troublesome foot behaved quite well through the evening but, again, would not allow me to sit up and read for long. Pat decided to work on at her parcel wrapping until it was all done. I must have got off to sleep quickly, because she told me in

## Friday 15 December 2017

It did let me sleep quite well, mercifully. I was horried to find, when I got up for a pee at around 2am, that Pat was still at the presents. I shouted down and tried to persuade her to come to bed, but she was determined to carry on, and I don't remember her coming to bed at 2:30, as she assured me she had.

I got up at 7:15am feeling quite refreshed, and went through my normal morning routine. Alistair was up and about to go and meet a friend at Meadowhall. He was gone when Bailey and I got back from our 20-minute walk in a damp and chilly 3 degree wind.

The good news was that my weight was down to 13 stone 9½ pounds. This seems improbable as it is 5¾ pounds lighter than three weeks ago. However, I do seem almost to have given up eating, so maybe the loss is real.

Pat was going out for her annual Christmas lunch with 'the girls' today, extraordinarily at the Old Bell in Barnby Moor, on the way to Retford from here. Amazing because, in my twenties while working for AEI, then Europ's biggest electrical manufacturer, I stayed there to research an article on the technology we were developing for Bevercotes Colliery which, at the time, was the National Coal Board's research base, where they checked out all their new technology 3000 feet below ground. This gave me two fascinating days underground, working with a top photographer

Before she went I managed to get our growing Christmas tree into the house – quite a battle – with a temporary container (the enamelled steel tray we use when the microwave is being an oven) under the pot. I had to cut off a few centimetres from the main stem, because either it had grown or Pat, when she re-potted the tree, had left it standing higher and it didn't clear the ceiling of the window recess. A few needles dropped on the way in so I decided to continue yesterday's domestic chores by vacuuming the conservatory and kitchen floors and then mopping them, using the new Addis flat microfibre mop I bought recently and a Mr Muscle bottle containing some mystery cleanser chosen by Pat and labelled 'Kitchen Floor'. The mop was brilliant but when dry the tiles didn't have much of a shine. I put the spare head on the mop and gave them a dry rub, but there still wasn't much lustre. Over to the expert...

So here I was, really busy, while Pat and Alistair were out enjoying themselves. They should be going over to Buxton together tomorrow to collect Ewan and Tom but when Alistair came back it emerged that they were sent home from school today with some sort of tummy bug. I'm not quite sure why she was going, but things are still pretty strained between him and Julie and he probably needs support.

Between moppings, and as requested by Pat, I gave Barney a call on his mobile. He answered immediately, sounding quite strong and cheerful – far better than the lad Pat had described seeing yesterday. He said he couldn't cough, which I said was probably good because his chest might not be ready for explosive stresses after (my joke, at which he managed generously to produce a chuckle) having had a JCB driven through it a couple of days ago! We had a very pleasant ten-minute chat. He has been told he could be going home as soon as next Monday – just three days

away and a week before Christmas – which would be amazing (and wonderful) considering the battering his chest has taken. He thought – perhaps fancifully – that he might even get over to our Boxing Day celebration.

Later in the afternoon I fine-tuned the menu and shopping list for Sunday.

After Pat got home and her three friends had had coffee and mince pies with us, we got stuck into putting the lights and other embellishments on the tree. That and other decorations got pretty complicated and by 9 o'clock I had had enough!

Pat is still going to Buxton with Alistair tomorrow, which leaves me to do the pre-party shopping, which will have to be before they go as Alistair is awaiting some overdue deliveries. I will then do some of the more difficult bits of decorating and as much food-prep as possible for Sunday. I want everything as near ready as possible when we get up on Party Day with only baguettes to buy.

### **Monday 18 December 2017**

This is rather a late entry as the weekend was quite frenzied. Alistair and Pat did, indeed, go off the Buxton while I did whatever I could towards the family party (I can't remember much but I certainly had a busy day!). The work continued through Saturday evening and Sunday, until my daughter Sarah and her husband Dave arrived, shortly followed by stepson Steve, his wife Sue and daughters Anastasia (freshly back from a study year in Florida) and Josie. Most of my planned menu had been fulfilled and a good time was had by all. By the time Pat and I were alone we were pretty exhausted, but proud that 'the old firm' had managed to keep up its high standards of catering.

I don't remember much of last night, except that I didn't see the clock until 7:30am. I got up straight away and, after my ablutions, took poor old Bailey for a 20-minute walk, which was completely uneventful.

Pat was taking Alistair with her to Anton's, so I had time to wrap her five presents from me, even printing some rather nice full-colour micrographs of snow crystals, which I scavenged off the web a few years ago and have been tinkering with each Christmas since, on stiff glossy photo paper to cut up into gift tags. I had a nasty turn when one sheet jammed in the printer and I had to get it out with my surgical forceps because it hadn't occurred to my addled brain to take the paper tray out!

Alistair seemed to be developing another very painful kidney stone and had to contact our GP practice, but he survived long enough to eat a light lunch of leftovers from last night. Pat and I finished tidying the debris away and she sorted out some laundry, and by about 3:40pm – nearly our usual time for a cup of tea and a biscuit – we were ready to sit down and relax. From this viewpoint the run-up to Christmas looks pretty undemanding, but we will see...

Actually Pat got quite worried because the GP had told Alistair to go to the A&E and he had only reported back once that he was waiting for some pain control. He didn't answer subsequent texts and at 9pm she phoned A&E. Eventually he came home having had some relief.

I had my usual silly antics trying to read in bed for a decent period before the left foot intervened, but luckily I was quite tired and happy to get my head down.

## **Tuesday 19 December 2017**

Without logging, I don't know how many times I got up for a pee during the night, but it felt like quite a lot. Maybe I should reinstate the log, but that might mean not getting back to sleep as quickly as I am at the moment.

I got up before 7:15 this morning and managed another 20-minute walk in spite of the aches and pains in legs and feet after all my domestic activities yesterday. We had a couple of slightly difficult encounters with other dogs, but nothing I couldn't manage, and I got us home without too much discomfort.

The rest of the day was a mix, but the best news we got was that of Barney being home at last from the hospital in Leeds. Pat had a long chat with him and we agreed that we would go over to Loxley to see him tomorrow. It's a huge relief that he has come out of this monstrous surgery and doesn't need any more institutional care.

After a long period of indifference to food, I really enjoyed some of Pat's leek and potato soup with some of a baguette from Sunday evening crisped up using the 'convection' function of our combi microwave oven, lots of Lurpak and then a generous dose of Le Rustique Camembert and creamy Colston Basset Stilton, which even the dog enjoyed, to follow. This all went down very well with a couple of glasses of organic Chilean Malbec which had survived the Sunday evening vultures, who had drunk a good deal more red wine than I thought. Self-service is a dangerous game.

## **Wednesday 20 December 2017**

I had no recollection of getting up for pees during the night, or of my usual spells of wakefulness, when I came to in the dark morning. I rolled from my side onto my front, immediately putting pressure on my bladder, and got up to find that it was 7:17am. I only felt half-awake, and was really disappointed that it was too late to go back to sleep. I came to once I was downstairs, and the first part of the walk – with daylight only just beginning – quickly perked me up. My pace was brisk all the way round, with none of the usual punishment from the battered legs and feet. I forgot to start the stopwatch when we left, but I was confident that we did the usual circuit in no more than 20 minutes.

I could hear the pump that drains our upstairs shower when we got back, to Pat was obviously on the move, desperate to see her first grandson after his dreadful ordeal.

We had a good run into Sheffield and found Barney and his Mum Nicky on good form. His girlfriend Gemma was there too. We were shown the amazingly neat operation scar, running down from his Adam's apple to below his solar plexus, looking narrow and dry without stitches or staples. Amazing! He was on good form, and we were greatly relieved to see him and Nicky so relaxed after his ordeal.

Traffic on the way back was dire, but we made it home, to a very welcome cup of tea, in reasonable time.

Our appetites were less than voracious, but I checked the two bags of Young's scampi in the freezer ('cook direct from your freezer') and took out the bag containing the left-over fries from Alistair's last kebab takeaway. With some of the Marie-Rose sauce left from Sunday this should make a decent meal. I put two baking sheets in the oven and set the temperature to 190°C.

The scampi- so-called 'whole-tail' were a disgrace to Youngs. The meat, while pleasant-tasting and with a decent texture, was in tiny pieces. Any Langoustine with a tail like that would have scampered under a rock with it tucked between its legs. The coating, on the other hand, was thick and wet with a scanty layer of crumbs which would not brown in the oven but made each portion look huge. The elderly fries were pretty dire too, leaving only my Marie-Rose sauce to redeem the meal.

Tomorrow is the winter solstice and the days will start to lengthen from then on.

### **Thursday 21 December 2017**

I had a restless night following a pee-break at around 3am. I was tossing and turning for ages worrying about all sorts of stuff. I must have got to sleep eventually, and work towards 7am needing another pee. I gave up fighting this just after 7 and was downstairs by ten-past.

It was a murky morning, but bizarrely mild at around 9°C. Pat had awakened when I was getting dressed and was downstairs by the time Bailey and I got home from a pleasant walk, despite the murk. As soon as possible after breakfast Pat and I set out for Morrisons in holiday-busy traffic. We had a shortish shopping list but still managed to spend well over £200. Then, with three items remaining unticked 65`, we moved to Sainbury's and were home shortly after 11:15.

Unloading and unpacking the five big bags we had filled was no mean task but we got everything stowed away eventually and settled down for a much needed cup of coffee. Pat had decided to do beef stew and dumplings for dinner tonight, hoping to perk Alistair up, though I felt that would take more than a good dinner. Meanwhile I went outside to cut cypress, ivy, holly, pine and other greenery for Pat to use in to decorating inside the house. When this was done I needed to try repairing one lace of my increasingly-loved Hi-Tec walking shoes. They have become more and more comfortable for me over the past few weeks, finally knocking my long-time favourite Reebok trainers off their perch. The eyelet had gone off one of the laces and the only solution I could think of was to trim the stringy core and the plaited covering and dip the end in some kind of glue, PVA being the favourite. This had dried, giving the end of the lace a hard, dry, still finish. I re-dipped it after dinner. Meanwhile there were Google, Ebay and Amazon.

We had bought two large bags of Maris Piper potatoes for the Christmas Day roasties, plus a modest bag of baby new potatoes, so the several pounds of potatoes left in our veg basket needed using. We baked them in their jackets and, when they were cool enough to handle, I spooned the insides out. This was a bit of a nightmare because the skins were very papery – maybe they needed longer baking. The process was very messy. I put the insides through the potato ricer and decided to give our mighty

Kitchen Aid Artisan food mixer a rare outing. This is one of the few US products that really command respect from me – it is built like a brick outhouse and makes even Pat's Mum's old Kenwood Chef, now long gone, seem puny. With quite a lot of butter and cream added, the result was more *pommes purées* than mash, perfectly smooth and really delicious.

The beef stew, dumplings and mash were great. I ate far more than I had expected to, which was much more than I had eaten for some time.

### **Friday 22 December 2017**

I got up at 7:15 this morning without difficulty, after a night that seemed to have included quite a few trips to the loo but without much lost sleep. Bailey and I did the same walk as we have all week in 19½ minutes, managing a week's total of 1 hour 40 minutes.

Pat had to go to Anton's (yet again!) for what was supposed to be an assessment of his mental capacity but turned out to be something totally, much to her disgust. She came home very upset and disappointed.

Meanwhile, when I started the PC up I found that Windows 10 was in the middle of a monster update. I spent most of the morning logging and recording 'progress' and seriously considering calling my local IT man to wipe the whole machine clean and reinstall Windows 7 when, at around 11:30, the machine appeared to have settled down and presented me with my accustomed desktop. Everything seemed to be working until I told *Outlook* to 'Send/Receive' emails. This produced an error message that led me to repair MS *Outlook* using the original installation CD. Before that I had been resorting to webmail, thanks to my 1&1 hosting and mail account. To my amazement it actually fixed himself and all seemed to be well.

As before, opening programs (not 'Apps', silly Microsoft!) and web links were annoyingly slow, as they had been for quite a few days. I checked my broadband speed, but this was normal. In fact, that wouldn't have affected the opening of programs. On the plus side, there was quite a big chunk of free space (12.5GB) on my miserable 62.8GB C drive, which had been almost completely lost since the recent updates. Some cleaning up must have taken place overnight.

I spent quite a while going through my PaulWork folder, which is on an external drive – not on drive C – and deleting masses of ancient and unwanted documents and files. To my surprise things seemed to speed up somewhat.

Aidan stopped off on his way home from work to deliver the turkey – a gift to all staff from his employers. It was quite a monster at nearly five kilos. That and the ribs of beef we bought at Morrisons should keep us in cold meat for a week after Christmas and our traditional family Boxing Day bash! Oh yes – there will also be the gammon we bought from Morrisons, which we will cook tomorrow...

In an attempt to reactivate my bowel I warmed and ate a whole large can of baked beans at lunchtime. As a result I had no appetite for dinner, but later on, after Pat and Alistair had eaten, I managed a modest portion of stew, dumplings and mash. This weighed rather heavily on my stomach but it settled towards the end of the evening.

## Saturday 23 December 2017

After a day with no real ankle problems yesterday, I settled in bed to read, and within 15 minutes the left foot began its antics. I was in really severe pain within about ten minutes and had to move. Why this happens when I am sitting up in bed with the foot out in the fresh air and no load even from the light down duvet on my toes, I simply cannot understand. I had taken a precautionary dose of two paracetamols and one Naproxen with my bedtime milk, apparently without benefit, so I plastered the painful areas of the foot with Voltarol gel, also to very little effect. I walked up and down the bedroom and en-suite several times and sat on the edge of the bed with the lower leg carefully placed for quite a long time. This eased the pain a little but it came back as soon as I lay down. I went through this cycle about three times before going to sleep, and was wakened again by the pain an hour or so later.

After that, apart from an unknown number of loo visits, I must have slept deeply until after 7am, when Pat decided to get up to end a very restless night. I was tempted to stay in bed for a while but decided to support her.

My early-morning visit to the loo demonstrated graphically the laxative benefits of baked beans – the most satisfactory result for over a week!

We had wholemeal toast and marmalade for breakfast – something I normally eat with real gusto but which seemed to settle heavily on the remains of yesterday's meals.

Alistair had gone off to Sheffield to get a new tattoo done, and after breakfast Pat went up to The Original Factory Shop to get some stocking-fillers for Ewan and Tom who will be here on Boxing Day.

Today is a strange day. Pat and Alistair did a fine job with the decorations yesterday and this morning there seemed to be relatively little to do. So we decided to finish as much cooking as we could. Before I started, though, I went to the small Asda near home and picked up some things we really needed and some we didn't such as two packs of their lovely *macarons*. The shop was boiling with people and it took quite a while to find the half-dozen things I bought.

I boiled – actually, simmered – the 3.5kg piece of gammon in three hours and managed to strip the skin off, leaving the fat, once it was cool enough to handle. Pat made the 'frosting' (icing, unless you are an American) for the chocolate cake, having already iced (actually, marzipanned) and decorated the real Christmas cake. I also made the neck stuffing for the turkey from onions and garlic, rough sausage meat from Morrisons and chestnut purée, while Pat made sage-and-onion stuffing to be made into and baked as balls.

I decided that the best way to deal with the turkey and the rib of beef would be to do the bird in the 'normal' oven and the beef in the microwave pretending to be a convection oven. Finally, we managed to sit down and watch the penultimate episode of the final *Rizzoli and Isles* season.

My foot behaved fairly well through the day, though it did protest a bit as I sat down, leaving me almost dreading bedtime. Maybe I should pass on reading and lie down as soon as I get into bed...

## **Thursday 28 December 2017**

We did pretty well for a couple of oldies, putting on the full Christmas dinner – with Aidan's 5.5kg turkey as the centrepiece – for ourselves, Alistair, Aidan and Donka but failing to persuade Anton to come to the table or to eat anything at all. I think he has lost all interest in more-or-less everything and we can't really tell whether he gets much out of his constant watching of the *Quest* TV channel. He drank a couple of beers through the evening, but apart from that his cigarettes seemed to be his only pleasure.

Boxing Day with about a dozen family members went well with the gammon and beef much appreciated. The high spot was the arrival of Barney on top form, demonstrating the new guitar pedal he got for Christmas from his two grandmothers.

Anton had decided he wanted to go home on Wednesday – probably something to do with his care schedule, so we took him home and didn't hang around there. To be honest, we were relieved to say goodbye to him.

So we survived our latest excursion into mass catering and everyone seemed very happy.

Now here we are back to our boring old routine. Well – not quite, because we have both been feeling really tired and had a mostly lazy day. I had to be at the hospital at 1pm for my echo-cardiogram appointment and then the fitting of a 24-hour heart monitor, both of which were with delightfully friendly and cheerful nurses, the first of whom was particularly interested in my musical background and had really catholic tastes in music herself.

We watched a lot of TV during the afternoon and evening, and turned in fairly early. My foot was behaving fairly well so I managed to get more comfortable in bed than usual, even with my three electrodes, their cables and the little electronic monitor, which I was able to put under my pillows.

## **Friday 29 December 2017**

I had an amazingly comfortable night, with only *two* trips to the loo, compared with seven a few nights ago. I felt good, lying half-awake in the morning, and got up when I thought my watch said 8:20, but it was actually 8:10. The forecast had changed dramatically to heavy snow all morning, though this had not arrived by 9:30. I needed to get the monitor back to the hospital as soon as possible.

I was lucky with the weather (only light sleet) and, by avoiding exposed country routes, I got to the hospital without difficulty. The barriers were up on all the car parks and I got a free space near the main entrance, hiked to the Cardio-Respiratory department, handed in my monitor and headed swiftly for home, getting back before the sleet got any worse.

Later on I split some more logs and kindling, cleared the ashes from the wood stove and hoovered up the mess. Then, having left the new satnav plugged into the PC's USB connection to charge earlier, I was able to switch it on and get into the settings. With some difficulty I got Rotherham Hospital set up as a destination in preparation for next Friday's pre-colonoscopy appointment. The hospital looks like a difficult place to reach and access, and the available information, on paper and online, is minimal. I have to admit that I am not looking forward to this experience,



but my strange gastro-intestinal symptoms – mainly constipation and loss of appetite in someone who has been a committed glutton for decades – suggest that something is up and a full check is a good idea. I wish I didn't know what to expect, but it isn't long since I supported Pat in her combined endoscopy and colonoscopy tests and it wasn't much fun. It's the starvation and purgative you need to totally empty the bowel so that the examining doctor can see everything without wading through poo.

I lit the fire at around 4:30. after attacking the leftover turkey, beef and gammon which were bunging up half the fridge. I put on a huge stockpot while Pat stepped in and decided on some good ways to use the meats and we began by preparing beef-and-mushroom Stroganoff for tonight's dinner. To facilitate this I did a quick run up to the Co-op and found that they, as well as Asda, had the boxes of small French *macarons*, so I grabbed a box along with mushrooms, soured cream and onions. The beef strips were a bit tough but the mushrooms and sauce were good with the rice.

### **Friday 29 December 2017**

I had a decent night but early in the morning I started worrying about Friday's appointment at Rotherham Hospital, particularly parking there because the map seemed to imply that the place was surrounded by public car-parks but had none of its own, so as soon as I had poured my morning tea I googled 'Rotherham Hospital parking' and was reassured to find that all four belonged to the hospital. Why did this matter? I really don't know – maybe I just needed something to worry about when the real concern is the colonoscopy!

### **Monday 1 January 2018**

For the first time since we got together, we didn't celebrate the New Year last night and were both in bed by about 10:30. We had decided to give up on the TV series *Hannibal*, which is supposed to provide a back story for *The Red Dragon*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Hannibal* and *Hannibal Rising* but actually drags on through more than one full season without much real entertainment value. It was particularly undermined by *84 Charing Cross Road* and a compilation of interviews with Anthony Hopkins which we had watched during the afternoon, so we gave up on it and switched to *The Red Dragon*. Pat ran out of steam about half-way through, and I had no problem leaving it as I know the movie almost off by heart.

My feet allowed me to enjoy reading in bed and, I think, to get off to sleep fairly quickly. I was blissfully comfortable after waking up, with all bones and muscles sprawling happily around the bed, but shortly before 8am I decided to commit to a New Year resolution by getting up and taking Bailey for his first walk for a week. He hadn't fussed on any of the holiday mornings but went berserk when he saw me getting his harness off the hook. With the temperature at about five degrees we did the regular circuit in 20½ minutes. Both my feet protested but, unusually, it was the right foot, shin and knee that complained loudest (that's the one with the collapsed ankle replacement, which is usually fairly pain-free but had felt rather bruised after the Christmas labours).

Pat went off to Anton's this morning in spite of being quite upset by his churlish behaviour while he was here for Christmas. By 11:30 I had got

up-to-date with my routine admin jobs including requesting our repeat prescriptions online and updating my bank-account spreadsheet, which was a little challenging because I had missed out one entry!

I went out to Sainsbury's for dinner ingredients in the morning. The feet were still quite painful but I coped.

We cooked together during the afternoon: Pat making Beef Bourguignon and me a large batch of mashed potato to go with it. I boiled the potatoes, rather than microwaving them, and they began to fall, suggesting that they were Maris Pipers. I put them through the ricer onto thin slices of unsalted butter, stirred the result and then transferred it to the bowl of the mighty Kitchen Aid mixer. Previously I used the wire whisk but this time I chose the more rigid cast-metal one. As the machine began stirring slowly I poured in a generous amount of cream left over from Christmas, and when the speed topped out the mash was wonderful. A small seasoning of salt and ground white pepper finished the job.

The resulting mash was firmer than the batch I made a few days ago but very rich and creamy. The beef dish was excellent, though the meat I had bought in the morning was disappointingly dry after a long, gentle stewing in red wine.

My amazing radio-controlled Casio watch seemed not to have adjusted its time recently, so I spent a while studying the instructions and confirming that auto-adjust was switched on. I decided I should put the watch on the window-sill for the night, as recommended.

My feet and legs were feeling the strain of shopping and standing on the hard kitchen floor in socks for a long time while cooking. They stayed pretty painful for the rest of the day but I was able to read for a decent time in bed and then sitting on the edge, and settled comfortably for the night.

## **Tuesday 2 January 2018**

I was awake in pitch darkness for quite a while before I got up at 7:10. The sky was quite black when I looked out of the window.

The watch was exactly synchronised with the digital clock/radio, so my efforts had obviously paid off.

It was still pretty dark when we set off for our walk, but a crazy red dawn was breaking in the east and the whole sky brightened as we walked. We finished the usual route without incident in 21 minutes 9 seconds.

The day was quite uneventful. Alistair had been out overnight, returning in the mid-morning and then going out again. His social life seems to have taken off since old school and work friends learned from *FaceBook* that he had left Julie. Aidan dropped in for a short visit before his brother vanished again, but otherwise Pat and I were alone. She had ironed herself to a standstill so I put on the recorded episodes of *Little Women* for her while I buried my nose in the Tess Gerritsen novel I am currently reading.

By around 5pm I decided that the day was damp and clammy enough to require a fire, and I had just enough wood in the basket to last through the evening.

By mid-evening the left foot put on one of its worst performances, requiring several applications of Voltarol gel, but I managed to get it calmed down enough to allow me to read in bed for quite a while and settle down to sleep without problems.

### **Wednesday 3 January 2018**

Storm Eleanor was well under way here when I woke up, with noisy blasts of wind, rain rattling on the windows and various unidentified things banging about outside. It was still pitch-dark when I got up at 7:15 so I decided to postpone the walk until I could see what the conditions looked like. In the end I decided to abort this morning's walk and hope to make it good on Saturday. From the news, it looked as if we were beginning to take more severe batterings from these Atlantic storms.

Pat decided to start taking down the Christmas decorations. I bagged all the greenery with some of the last summer stuff from the garden, which will make the first bag for the tip this year. The greenery was very dry and brittle, thanks to our central heating and log fires, so there was a lot of broken debris to vacuum up from the carpet.

We actually sat down for a lunch of cheese and melba toast and later had a dinner of linguine with fresh tomatoes, basil and mozzarella, after which I finished the Christmas pudding from the festive dinner, with brandy butter and cream. My stomach was feeling rather distended at bedtime, which I hoped was just from how much I had eaten rather than something that might have gone off!

At bedtime I was able to read for quite a long time, with my legs stretched out and toes turned up, without the usual pain developing in my left foot.

### **Thursday 4 January 2018**

After some restless napping I suddenly jerked awake at about 7:15 this morning. I was out of breath and shaky and would have given anything just to roll over and go back to sleep. However, by the time I had wrestled with my clothes and got downstairs I was feeling more normal. Bailey had obviously decided that we were going for a walk today, so I decided to go along with that. It was a very gloomy morning, so I waited until I could see something approximating to daylight before setting out. The sky was dark grey and light rain was falling, but we managed the usual circuit. My feet and lower legs were still aching and felt quite weary, but I got round in just under 21 minutes, including poo stops and brief encounters with other dogs. I don't think I have mentioned this before, but I have given up pausing the stopwatch for each poo because I forget to restart it more often than not, making it difficult to keep an accurate record of walk times!

We were both feeling quite tired after yesterday's dismantling of the Christmas decorations, which are still waiting to be boxed and packed away in the garage loft. Alistair had been away all night and Pat had arranged to meet him at Toys 'r' Us to sort out a birthday present for Tom. She left at about 12:30 and they returned together in the middle of the afternoon. We had scrambled eggs and baked beans on toast for what I suppose I should call 'supper' and turned in for an early night just after 9pm. I had got through the evening's TV without the support of Voltarol.

## **Friday 5 January 2018**

I had programmed the new satnav with the postcode of Rotherham General Hospital but something went amiss when we set off: either the machine had discovered a really eccentric route to Rotherham or I had done something silly. Before we left the village I decided to disconnect it and take off along a local road known as Rotherham Baulk. This turned out to be a long and winding road but eventually took us into Rotherham. I was sure that we would see plenty of hospital and A&E signs but we didn't, but eventually, at one major junction, we did see such a sign and found the hospital.

We met with a delightful nurse practitioner who took all my details – and I do mean all – and explained what was in store for me. I left with a big wad of paper which I need to study over the weekend, and an appointment for my colonoscopy on the 25 January. The preparation isn't quite the same as Pat's was, but similar, aimed at me arriving on the table with my lower intestine completely empty and clean. No doubt I will write more on this...

We did a biggish shop in Morrisons near Rotherham and then tried to get into Whitby's for lunch, but the carpark was jammed solid, so we came home and had our first fish-and-chips dinner from the local chippy for a very long time. It wasn't a patch on Whitby's. But all three of us enjoyed it anyway.

My legs and feet were rather wrecked by the time I had walked to the shops and back, after hiking all round the hospital in the morning. However, I managed to read in bed and then lie down without any real pain.

## **Saturday 6 January 2018**

Pat and Alistair were up early to pick up his boys in Buxton and take them to some daft electronic battle game for Tom's birthday. I had opted not to go because my lower legs and feet were still feeling pretty dire, but the price I paid was many trips to and from the garage to get the Christmas decorations, which Pat and I had dismantled and boxed up last night, stacked at the end of the garage ready for Alistair to do the ladder bit – the first time I haven't managed it single-handed. Once the boxes were all stashed, and the big table in the conservatory was clear, I laid a wad of newspapers on the end of the table and lugged the potted – and now dismally naked and very heavy – Christmas tree from the sittingroom window-sill to the paper pad on the table. This allowed me to slide it to the other end without doing any damage and collect it through the outside doors. I put it back in its place on the patio and gave it a good watering. It was looking good after a fortnight on top of a large radiator. I sorted out the lace cloth and ornaments on the table.

Once the tree was gone I had to get all the fallen needles off the sill onto the floor and vac them up. I also had to move the dozen bottled of quality Spanish red Pat had bought me for Christmas from the floor into the garage. With a bit more vaccing and tidying, including bringing our large and very posh table lamp up from the summer house and into its home where the tree had been standing, the room was looking like home. I had

trouble finding a bulb for the lamp and will have to find a more economical one than the 100-watt one I was stuck with.

In the middle of all this I dragged our heavy king-size airbed into the sitting-room to try and locate the suspected leak. It self-inflated to pretty high pressure but I couldn't make it sag! I wondered whether the inflate/deflate valve hadn't been turned right up to the inflate stop.

Finally, I laid the fire ready for the expected cold evening and vacuumed round the hearth and stove.

Pat was very appreciative of my post-Christmas clear-up.

### **Saturday 6 January 2018**

I had a very restless night and in the early morning I was convinced that I hadn't slept at all. Actually, when I came to I realised that I must have got quite a lot of sleep, possibly in a lot of short bursts with long wakeful intervals in between. I know I had worried quite a lot, as I often do, with my forthcoming colonoscopy in mind as well as Pat's commitment to go to Buxton for a short visit to Tom on his birthday. We would be getting there for about 4pm and only staying for a fairly short time in view of the situation between Julie and Alistair. However, sunset will be soon after 4pm and sub-zero temperatures are forecast, so I will be taking my full ski outfit (less the boots, of course!).

### **Monday 8 January 2018**

I was awake early and still concerned about this afternoon's planned trip to Buxton, which stopped me getting back to sleep. I got up just in time to catch the 7:30 news summary on Radio 4 and managed to fire myself up for a walk with Bailey. My legs and feet, which had been pretty uncomfortable after Friday's big clear-up, felt really good this morning, and I was particularly aware of my long strides when walking around the house. These were sustained when we got out and for the full 20 minutes of painless walking.

We had a fairly close shave with Stanley, who was on his way home from the football pitch. He and Bailey spotted each other when they were about 100 metres apart and both went into aggression mode. The guy leading Stanley turned off the footpath onto one of the culs-de-sac and we turned in the opposite direction heading for the village hall, but Bailey was quite agitated most of the way home. His water bowl outside the back door was frozen right through.

After breakfast I felt very sleepy, verging on groggy, in spite of a decent – if abbreviated – night's sleep followed by exercise in crisp, cold air (-2 degrees). I continued to feel under the weather, even after a rare second visit to the loo, and Pat remarked that I looked pale and pasty and told me I had better stay here this afternoon. The only guess at a diagnosis was that I ate quite a lot of really ripe cheese – Stilton, Camembert and St-Agur – for lunch yesterday. We ate the same soup and chips last night, so that wasn't a likely contender, but I did eat quite a few chocolaty sweets through the evening.

Pat didn't go to Anton's today because Social Services have asked her to meet them there tomorrow to discuss his finances yet again – an early

start at 9:30am. I wish they would take the pressure off her and do their jobs.

For a little light relief at around midday, I got the tiny-print instruction book for my Casio solar-powered radio-controlled watch, which had got itself all out of adjustment. I had already got it back to daily (or nightly) synchronisation with the atomic clock, but the hands were doing their own thing. With a degree of eye-strain I managed to get the hands to their home positions and then locked on to the time shown by the digital display. I know it's silly, and maybe a bit OCD, but it is very satisfying to see the second hand hit the 12 mark exactly on the Greenwich Mean Time signal's final 'pip'. If you buy a precision instrument like this it makes sense to have it working correctly even if you don't really care what the exact time is!

I got a text from Alistair telling me that he and Pat were on the road at 17:22. I had already done quite a bit of preparation – chicken wings and potato wedges, so I got the wedges in the oven quite soon after receiving the message.

After dinner, when I made tea, the top of my left foot went absolutely crazy, with excruciating pain. A short barefoot walk eased it a little while I typed this paragraph, but would the relief be sustained?

It did ease for a while and even allowed me to read in bed for a while as long as I sat on the edge of the bed for short intervals. The real crunch came when I got my head down to sleep. There was no position that would allow me to relax and some really increased the pain. This seemed pretty cruel after such a good walk this morning.

## **Tuesday 9 January 2018**

At some point after trying to get to sleep I gave up and went downstairs, much to Bailey's brief delight. I took two Paracetamol and one Naproxen with a decent draught of water and went straight back to bed. I didn't notice the time, so I don't know whether or not I had slept before going down. I seem to remember sitting on the edge of the bed reading in the dark (thanks to my backlit Kindle screen) and then I must have got off to sleep and, I think, had an almost pee-free night. I was really comfortable when I woke up and was disgusted to see that it was 7:15 when I checked the time.

The legs and feet felt reasonable while getting dressed and going downstairs in a damp, dark morning and the walk went even better than yesterday's: I felt almost as if I was back to my old 'power walking' pace, and we finished the walk in about 18½ seconds.

Pat was busy preparing to go to Anton's when we got back, so I had a quick breakfast. As soon as she had gone I took the little Vax vac upstairs, stripped off the fitted sheets and pillow cases, vacuumed the fleecy mattress covers in all directions, put on fresh sheets (a major wrestle every week!) and pillow cases, shook the quilt thoroughly and vacced the thick carpet.

Later on Pat realised that Alistair needed to earn some money and we had lots of odd jobs that need doing. Once we started thinking this way the number of jobs was pretty huge. He started by putting all the boxes of

Christmas stuff back up in the garage loft and then started tidying and cleaning the garage itself.

My feet behaved well through the day. It would be interesting to see if anything erupted when I went to bed.

### **Wednesday 10 January 2018**

Nothing did erupt. I was able to get through the whole day and settle for sleep without any anti-inflammatory gel.

This morning was dark, damp and drizzly when I got up, but Bailey and I managed a brisk walk and were back by about 7:50. That was the third walk which I did with long, even strides at a good pace.

One of Alistair's friends was coming to visit this evening, so there was an eruption of cooking, cleaning and tidying, not to mention log-splitting and fire-laying on my part. By about 1:30pm everything was pretty well shipshape.

I gave Al a master-class in meringue-making from the recipe provided by the Roux Brothers, using eight lovely new-laid eggs from our neighbours across the road and the mighty Kitchen Aid mixer which made such short work of the two batches of mashed potato I made a couple of weeks ago. The resulting raw meringue was dense and glossy-white. Long, slow cooking in the oven would test its quality later, but after following Chef Roux's cooking instructions it turned out to be very soft inside the crust, with a lot of clear syrup leaking out!

In spite of that, the meal went very well and we had a very pleasant evening.

And in spite of all the preparation work my feet and ankles made no demands on my stock of gel before I lay down to sleep!

### **Thursday 11 January 2018**

I woke up quite early after a reasonable night's sleep and treated myself to a short lie-in before going down just in time for the 7:30 news summary.

It was a mild (6 degrees), dry but dull morning. We did the walk in just over 20 minutes – slower than this week's others because of two poo-stops handled with only one bag and a slightly difficult encounter with a lady leading three dogs. The largest, an elderly Labrador, and Bailey got a bit cross so I had to drag him away. My legs and feet had felt tired and a little sore but soon recovered once home.

Today was uneventful with nothing notable to report, except that I had very little trouble from the feet, really only struggling a little when I got up after sitting for long periods. I did light the fire, because it was a clammy day rather than a cold one.

Once again I was able to sit up in bed for as long as I wanted without grief from the left foot, though I did keep it out from under the duvet until I was ready to go down.

## **Friday 12 January 2018**

I was awake for about 40 minutes before deciding, reluctantly, to get up just before 7:15. I felt quite groggy until I got my first cup of tea going.

It is a day under two weeks until my colonoscopy at Doncaster Royal Infirmary – and one week until my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. My imagination is beginning to run riot and I am getting quite worried about what the investigation will reveal.

I have started taking two senna tablets at bedtime and my morning visits to the loo are a little easier. The instructions from the hospital only specifies this on the first day of my four-day low-residue diet, but I think I will keep this up in place of the DulcoEase softeners.

My Friday weigh-in clocked 13 stone 9½ pounds, only a quarter of a pound heavier than the last check before Christmas,

This morning was misty and clammy with the temperature at about 6 degrees, but we managed the usual walk fairly comfortably in just under 19½ minutes. Bailey reacted aggressively to the Laborador with its two little pals again, and also to a black Lab which I have know for years which was about to come out of its home gate as we passed. I honestly don't think he is being playful but really would start a fight if I didn't restrain him. This is worrying, and makes our walks more stressful than they used to be. I have been asked to visit the vet to pick up his flea nad worming meds and get him weighed. I will mention the aggressive tendency when I go.

Towards lunchtime I did a quick Sainsburys run to get wings and floury Maris Piper potatoes and a few other oddments for dinner. While I was out I picked up a new 150-watt halogen bulb for the outside floodlight over the kitchen window, having gone up the ladder to see what was needed earlier.

Then we had a good cheese-and-crackers lunch before Alistair went out again. After lunch I got the ladder out again and put the new bulb in the floodlight. Bailey will have a lot more light when he is out at night now.

At 4pm I got up to make tea but Pat was fast asleep on the sofa. I heard her coughing while I was typing the last paragraph but she was still out when I went back to check. At 4:30 I went back to make the tea anyway.

During the early evening, the left foot became very uncomfortable, with a succession of piercing pain spasms in the big toe and the tendon that connects it. It took a long time for the Voltarol gel to relieve this, but it did in the end and by bedtime there was no significant pain at all.

## **Sunday 14 January 2018**

Yesterday was a quiet and rather lazy day for me, but not for Pat as she spent quite a lot of it ironing.

I decided to do chicken wings and potato wedges, but I overcooked the wings rather badly, making them rather dry and losing all their succulence.

For once, we managed to watch both one-hour episodes of the current BBC4 European crime series, *Spiral*, and didn't get to bed until past 11:30. I had no real problems with the troublesome foot last night and



got up at 8:30 this morning, managing to grab the bathroom before Alistair surfaced and enjoy the benefits of my Senna tablets. I went over the road for the paper and Anton's milk, rather hampered by aching legs and feet, while Pat was still in bed, and I had everything ready for breakfast by the time she came down.

Later on, I made a big bowl of mash while Pat made a big beef-shin stew, all of which we both enjoyed at dinner time.

I didn't need any gel on my foot until a precautionary drop before I got my head down after a decent read in bed.

### **Monday 15 January 2018**

I got up shortly after 7 o'clock. It was a very grey morning with a temperature of about 6 degrees and light rain forecast but not happening. I felt rather groggy but I managed all the usual stuff, even emptying the dishwasher before our walk, and we did the usual circuit in a little over 20 minutes. My legs and feet were a bit stiff and achy but I kept up a good pace.

This is my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday week, something I really don't feel like celebrating. I am beginning to feel my true age for the first time in my life. The day after my birthday I have to start the 'low residue diet' in preparation for my colonoscopy next Thursday. My visit to the loo was marred by a much bigger-than-usual smear of blood on the Andrex, so my cancer screening test is probably well timed. I had to push harder than I have since starting the nightly senna tablets, so hopefully this was just a haemorrhoid popping.

Once Pat had left for Anton's and Alistair had returned from a visit to the office where he will be starting work at the start of next month, and would field any phone-calls, I went up to change the sheets and pillow-cases and have a long, luxurious shower.

I am feeling strangely unsettled. The mere fact of being three-quarters of a century old is difficult enough to get my head round. The recent health problems after a lifetime of being pretty healthy have been depressing.

The bowel cancer screening has knocked my confidence: I am very aware of every abdominal twinge and bloated feeling, and have begun to think that I might actually have the dreaded disease. This morning's bloodshed didn't exactly help! I owned up to this anxiety when chatting with Pat and Alistair, being aware that I had been pretty gloomy for a few days, not showing much interest in anything.

The absence of feedback from my recent cardio-respiratory tests might be a good sign, but I really would like to know what my spell with the portable monitor showed. I went on the GP practice website, which allows access to all sorts of records but didn't show any hospital referrals, let alone any results.

Then there are the bloody legs and feet, both of which are quite worrying. When I get up from a longish sit down, or from bed, they feel weak and are quite painful, although they do ease as soon as I start walking. Unless I can get something done – and I really would like to avoid surgery with its long rehab times – I can only see things getting worse. I have just checked my *Outlook* diary: my next review will be in September unless I

ask for an earlier appointment, which Mr Milner did suggest I should do if things got worse. I need to stay positive: I can still do my 20-minute dog walks five times a week, drive the car long distances and walk round large supermarkets (though preferably with a trolley rather than an overloaded hand-basket as I did last week!). Stairs are becoming more and more of a problem and I think I should start exercising the right knee to see if I can use both legs rather than just the one.

Having just written the last sentence, I have just gone up and down our spiral staircase using both knees, and though I did take quite a bit of weight on both arms the right knee coped fairly well with quite modest pain. Thus encouraged, I then tried going up and down (backwards) using just the right leg and only the left hand. The bottom step is lower than the others, so I did that first and then the next one up and was really surprised. The hand is actually just allowing me to keep my weight forward rather than pulling it up.

Why I haven't made any attempt to correct the use of the right leg, I don't know – just laziness, I guess. Now I have figured out what is possible, I need to break the longstanding habit of doing all the work on the left leg and try to minimise the use of the arms.

After a fairly easy evening with the left foot I went upstairs using both legs quite easily and was able to read for as long as I wanted before applying a little Voltarol gel and getting my head down.

## **Tuesday 16 January 2018**

We were forecast sleet and snow for today, and when I got up for my last visit to the loo before actually getting up the en-suite window was covered in rain and I could hear it rattling outside the bedroom window.

I decided to keep up the good intentions and walked downstairs using both legs. This was a bit difficult in the dark but the problematic right knee coped quite well.

When I got downstairs my iPhone was showing a local temperature of 8 degrees. The sky was black at 7:15 and it was drizzling, but by the time I had had a cup of tea it was dry and brightening. The breeze was rather raw, but we had a pleasant walk lasting 21 minutes 8 seconds, just under a minute slower than yesterday with three poo stops and on my rather stiff legs.

By 9 o'clock the sky had blackened and some sleet was coming down. Pat was due to pick her friend Sue up for a girlie morning but was looking a bit anxious, particularly as the BBC's local forecast had changed quite a bit, warning of temperatures between 2 degrees and zero.

When I emptied the kitchen bin at about 9:20am, the temperature had dropped well below 5 degrees and light rain was falling, but the sky was looking brighter again.

I needed a second morning visit to the loo on Sunday and yesterday, which is very unusual for me, and before 9:30am today I could feel a second one brewing. I think I will stop taking the Senna tablets at night and go back to the gentler stool-softening ones.

Pat was out for the day with her friend Sue. She took our car and was quite anxious about the weather, but in the end it settled down and they had a good day together.

We were forecast to have a lot of snow through the evening and night.

I had very little trouble from the feet again today, and only put some gel on the left one when I was ready to go to sleep.

### **Wednesday 17 January 2018**

I got up at 7:10 this morning expecting to see a lot of snow, but there was almost none.

We went out for the walk as usual, but the pavements along our road were quite difficult with melting slush which was barely visible but compressed when walked on into a hard, very slippery surface. Luckily we have wide grass verges along most of the road and they were soft enough to provide some grip. Off the main road the pavements and the footpaths were clearer, but I decided to turn round after ten minutes to avoid the longer return route on the main road. When we got back on to our road a near-gale west wind was blowing straight into my face and I was more chilled than I could remember ever being when we got home.

The bin-wash man told me that the next village up the road was 'white-over' and really tricky to drive through, while our roads were clear. It rained steadily for most of the day and evening.

One of Alistair's friends was coming for dinner and Al was cooking a fairly ambitious Mexican meal for most of the afternoon. As usual, I did the rice – six portions of Uncle Ben's, cooked (as usual) far longer than the recommended ten minutes.

I had a nasty accident during the afternoon. Pat had mopped the kitchen floor and we thought it was dry enough to walk on, but I found a damp patch which felt like an ice rink under the HiTecs' soles. I did quite a bit of a splits and wrenched my poor persecuted left foot quite badly. It was painful for the rest of the day but it did let me read in bed and sleep quite well, in spite of having to come downstairs after midnight when I saw from the window over the loo that the outside floodlights were on, with the new 150-watt tube really lighting the garden up.

### **Thursday 18 January 2018**

My 75<sup>th</sup> birthday arrived with me feeling my usual groggy self when it was time to get up. With the bowel cancer screening programme's colonoscopy just a week away I haven't been feeling much like celebrating. Nor did I really want to go to Sheffield to get a memorial dolphin tattoo done in memory of my late son Dave.

The morning was bright and clear at 3 degrees, with no wind at all, so the walk was very pleasant. We finished in 20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> minutes. The foot had protested after setting out but had loosened up as we walked. It was getting more painful again towards the end of the lap, but nothing too dire, and sitting to write this has eased it.

I had a modest collection of presents to open after breakfast.

My birthday dinner ended up being sausages, egg and chips after I had walked across to the chippy. I can't honestly say I enjoyed this, but the slice of lemon polenta cake with cream was lovely (after the birthday firework had been lit and removed!)

### **Friday 19 January 2018**

Another groggy awakening on a bright and frosty morning (2 degrees) was followed by a difficult walk on pavements where some of the frost was visible but some wasn't, making the footing quite treacherous. At the end of ten minutes I decided to repeat Wednesday's route, turning round and heading back home, arriving in 20 minutes 56 seconds. The left foot had been quite painful since getting up, and it didn't enjoy the frost-avoidance ballet, which involved walking as much as possible on soggy grass verges, one little bit!

Breakfast was my first on the low residue diet in preparation for the colonoscopy: a modest portion of corn flakes with semi-skimmed milk and a teaspoonful of sugar, followed by just a drop of Pat's Trop50 orange juice, because mine is 'with bits' and is therefore forbidden. With that I washed down two Senna tablets. The instructions are confusing, but I assume that I only take these once to get rid of the residue from what I have been eating for the past few days. The diet aims to eliminate fibre from my meals for a week. I quite enjoyed it this morning – a pleasant change from my usual muesli, prunes and yogurt – but the novelty may wear out by next Thursday,.

After breakfast I took Bailey down to the vets' surgery to collect his latest delivery of flea-spotting pipettes and worming tablets, and to get him weighed. At 36 kilos 66 he was declared fit, which meant we could afford to be as generous as we currently are with the dog biscuits.

I allowed myself one Lotus biscuit with my coffee. Later on I checked the Lotus package and found that my biscuit contained 0.1g of fibre. Surely I can be allowed that!

After coffee I cleaned the fire out and went out to split and bring in two baskets of wood. With the temperature still at only 3 degrees I managed to work up a good sweat, which was sustained by vacuuming the whole of downstairs.

I made a Cheddar sandwich on white sliced bread for lunch, and we did an adjustment of the leek and potato soup for dinner, straining out the vegetables and returning just the potatoes to my portion. It tasted really good and went down very well with a freshly crisped baguette.

Then we had a bit of an orgy of Scandinavian crime dramas.

### **Monday 22 January 2018**

We had a weekend of unfulfilled plans.

On Saturday we were going to go to the farmers' market in Retford but Pat came downstairs with her back in spasm and was barely able to stand up straight. She had particularly wanted to get a nice bunch of flowers from M&S for her cousin Judy whom we would be meeting for lunch in Sheffield on Sunday, so we had a quick trip into town. M&S tempted us with a variety of goodies to eat.

We got a couple of very authentic croissants and two lovely little apricot tarts made with croissant dough. Pat had a tart and I had a croissant for a light lunch, and the same for breakfast on Sunday.

Sunday started with sleet, which gradually turned to snow. We were supposed to drive to Pat's sister Jackie's so that they could drive us to the restaurant, but I took a call from Judy questioning the wisdom of our plan as the weather was much worse in the centre of Sheffield. In the end we all agreed regretfully to shelve the plans.

Last night I managed to eat a good meal of bacon, eggs and fried bread followed by toast and my favourite French honey, which had been one of the temptations in Markies. I enjoyed this more than anything I have eaten for some weeks. Everything was within the diet limits, and from now on I have to stick to these rigidly.

This morning's weather was milder than we have had recently with the temperature at around 6 degrees. The ground was damp but not slippery, so we reverted to our usual route, completing it in 20¾ minutes, after which I was quite sweaty.

I had a decent portion of cornflakes with semi-skimmed milk and a modest spoonful of white sugar for breakfast. My mid-morning drink was two mugs of strong Java coffee, and I allowed myself one Rich Tea biscuit (well, the diet notes do say 'plain biscuits', and biscuits don't come much plainer than Rich Tea).

I spent some time during the morning reading the instructions for the colonoscopy. I started the low residue diet last Friday, the 19 January, and took two Senna tablets at the same time.

The main instruction for this diet is to avoid high-fibre foods such as fruit (fresh and dried), vegetables and salad because they take a long time to be digested and can therefore obscure the view for the colonoscopy. Potatoes are allowed provided no skin is eaten, and all sorts of white starchy stuff. Plain, simple dairy is okay, as are meats and fish plus a strange variety of 'other' foodstuffs and drinks.

The one mystery was the need to avoid 'red' foods including red-skinned potatoes even when peeled. Plain jelly should not be red. Jam must be seedless (fibre) but the colour red is not mentioned. I managed to google an explanation eventually, which said that red and purple dyes (which presumably include natural colours) can 'mask the lining of the colon'.

I think I will eat no more than I really want until my last meal at 4pm on Wednesday, the day before the procedure.

Then I start taking the purgative mixture, four litres in total starting at 6pm and 7pm after the last meal and 8am and 9am on the big day. This will give me monstrous diarrhoea, hopefully removing all traces of food from the colon, so I will need to be close to the loo until the effects of each litre wear off. I remember Pat spending hours on the loo when she took hers, so I could be in for a fun time! My appointment is at 2:30pm and I need to allow about an hour and a half travelling time, which gives me about four hours to get fully cleaned out. I will not have eaten anything solid since the 4pm deadline, but am allowed black tea and

coffee and clear flavoured drinks. Lots of water will probably be a good idea.

When Pat got back from Anton's and a visit to Barney she was quite shaken. She said the car's steering had 'locked' when turning left from the main street onto our road and she was unable to get round the corner properly. Obviously, if anyone had been driving fast towards the junction there could have been a nasty head-on collision. She had managed to get the offside wheels onto the pavement and park and then, when she switched the engine off and back on, the steering recovered and she got home safely.

I immediately called the Ford Service number and an AA patrol turned up fairly quickly. The patrolman connected his diagnostic unit to a socket under our dashboard – something I didn't know existed! – and this sent its data to his laptop. The voltages associated with the steering looked very erratic, and he agreed that the car really should not be driven. He went through all the procedures and arranged to get the car recovered to the local Ford garage which services the car. This entailed no less than two more patrol visits through the afternoon, the last driver taking our car in and coming back by taxi! The next step for me was to arrange a replacement car, but it turned out that Ford Service had no vehicles available and that Enterprise, their back-stop, had none either but hoped to have one for me tomorrow morning! I was, to say the least, less than impressed.

Pat has an appointment with a solicitor tomorrow to start setting herself up as a 'deputy' for Anton. This is one step away from obtaining a Power of Attorney. I was going to drive her, but with no car we had to ask Alistair to step into the breach. This was actually a good solution as I think he can be signed on as a 'deputy deputy' to support Pat.

## **Tuesday 23 January 2018**

I was awake early, worrying about absolutely everything, and was quite glad to get up for the last of innumerable pees at 7:05am. The temperature was a mild 6 degrees and there had been quite a lot of rain through the night, but this had stopped. My legs and feet were stiff and sore but we managed the usual walk in a slow 21 minutes 23 seconds (two poos included).

After breakfast I phoned the garage to see if they could provide a car, but the service manager didn't answer his phone. A little later another member of the team called to clarify the problem (which should have been clear from the AA report!) and he was quite sympathetic about the courtesy car. He said he would try to get one and would ring me at about 1pm.

All this just goes to confirm the impression I have that absolutely everything in the country is totally knackered. Nothing works any more. There was even a news item on TV this morning about sheltered housing for vulnerable people being unsafe, with many cases of negligence and abuse. Apparently this accommodation is not regulated or inspected by the Care Quality Commission. Local councils are responsible and, like all the other public services, are falling apart under the stress of Government cuts.

The thought of getting old – or, rather, much older than we are already – is getting seriously scary.

I finally managed to get the courtesy car at about 4pm – a spritely little Vauhall 2-door with a silly model name which was impossible to memorise – when I had another look it was 'Adam'!

The collapse of civilisation as we know it got worse. While Pat and Alistair were at the solicitors in the afternoon, trying to sort out her suggested rôle as a Deputy (similar to Power of Attorney) for Anton, I got a call from the Bowel Cancer Screening Team. It seemed that they had been unable to get a report on my recent cardio-respiratory investigation and would not therefore be able to do my colonoscopy on Thursday. I was actually quite happy to have it put off, but was amazed that the consultant had not reviewed my results obtained at the end of December.

To celebrate this let-off, I had a Ringtons Triple Chocolate biscuit and a digestive with my afternoon cuppa, and we had big jacket potatoes with baked beans and grated cheese, followed by leftover lemon polenta cake with cream for me.

The top of the left foot was unusually painful all day, so I took two paracetamols with one Naproxen with my bedtime milk and managed a decent read in bed after basting the foot with Voltarol gel.

### **Wednesday 24 January 2018**

I was up for a pee sometime after 5am and saw lots of rain on the ensuite window, driven by quite a violent wind. I slept intermittently for the next two hours, with the noise of the wind getting louder all the time. I got up at 7am and found that the immediate forecast on my phone was for heavy rain and a 47mph south-westerly gale. The rain had not got beyond the drizzle stage by the time we were ready for our walk, but the head-on wind was really violent when we turned south. I decided to cut the walk short and we were home in just under 10 minutes. The foot had been far less painful than it was yesterday.

Now that I was off the low residue diet I could have my usual breakfast of muesli, prunes and plain yogurt, which was a real treat, especially as I had just opened a pack of a lovely crunchy muesli. For lunch I made myself a cheese-and-Branston sandwich using toasted wholemeal bread – another real treat.

The rain and wind were still with us at coffee time – a really nasty patch of weather. I had planned to go and get my hair and beard cut but Pat said they looked ok and I decided to keep the winter insulation. Later on, however, I decided to have a shower, so I got my clippers out and gave my shaggy beard a good trim.

I had a call from the garage late in the afternoon to say that they still hadn't identified the car's problem and would like to keep it on the monitor for another couple of days.

One of Alistair's friends was coming here for dinner again tonight, and he was doing all the shopping and catering, including spaghetti alla carbonara.

By the time I had organised wine, glasses, lemon slices (from our own tree) and other aperitif sundries, my left foot was beginning to protest a little, but was vastly more comfortable than it was yesterday.

The meal was – shall we say? - *interesting*. The spaghetti had a rather strange texture. It went well, though, with adequate lubrication.

The foot behaved well through the evening and, once again, I was able to read in bed for quite a while and didn't need any gel.

### **Thursday 25 January 2018**

This should have been Colonoscopy Day. What a relief!

A smell of toast (and, it turned out, crumpets) was wafting up into our bedroom while I was having my usual extended cat-napping session. By the time I got up at 7:15 Al's guest had left.

It was a grey morning – mild at about 4 degrees and a little damp underfoot – but okay for our walk, which was uneventful apart from the corgis being out in their driveway and another dog on its lead on the opposite side of the street. These episodes got noisy but without contact nothing untoward happened. We got round our full route in 19¼ minutes.

Ironically, I had to pay a second visit to the loo after breakfast as my gut was feeling quite upset. This would have been my final clean-out before the colonoscopy if the appointment had not been changed. I suspect something I ate last night had disturbed my digestion.

Pat had a counselling appointment at 11am and opted to be driven to it rather than having her first go with the little Vauxhall – a good decision as the last thing she needed was to arrive for her session stressed by an unfamiliar drive!

We decided to combine this with a trip to Morrisons for me. I just managed to finish yet another ridiculously big shop in time to get back to the surgery and collect Pat. My feet had been aching all day and by the time I had done several laps of a huge supermarket they were really protesting. The pain stayed with me – though getting milder – for the rest of the afternoon but was relatively gentle by dinner-time.

The afternoon was dominated by trying to see a document sent to Pat by Social Services as an email attachment. It was a password-protected *Word* document produced in *Office 2007* and I was trying to open it in my antiquated *Office 2003*. I could find no way into it, so late on in the afternoon I decided to bite the bullet and install *Office 365* – the first version designed to work in *Windows 10*. I got this in eventually and managed to use the password to get into and even print the document! The new *Office* seemed to have picked up all its configuration from the *2003* version. It is going to take some getting used to, though...

### **Friday 26 January 2018**

After another long spell of brooding and catnapping I got up at 7:04am. The feet felt reasonable and we had a good walk, completing the usual route in about 19½ minutes. I was eager to get back to *Office 365*. Editing this *Open Office* document in *Word 365* didn't work terribly well, with no formatting toolbars available. I will have either to keep *Open Office*, which I thought I might be able to remove, or to save the



diary as a *Word* document. (*Word 365* does have the ability to convert documents to PDF format, by the way.)

Things got much worse later today. I ended up uninstalling *Office 2003* and reinstalling *Office 365* at least twice and eventually got my email back and found a clue to seeing the calendar. This diary is an Open Document Text which has the sort of features needed to number pages and produce the footer with a date and time stamp dynamically. *Word 365* may have these too, but I failed to find the paragraph styles I use for the date footer on each day's entry, so this document will remain with *Open Office Writer*.

I accidentally found the calendar in *Outlook 365* when I had given up looking for it. Down at the bottom left of the email window there are four little icons. One is a sort of chequerboard pattern about 5mm square which struck me as looking like a calendar page. One click confirmed this – a version of the usual *Outlook* working-week page with all my appointments and reminders intact.

Things were looking up!

At one point I decided to make *Microsoft Edge* my default web browser. I like *SeaMonkey*, but as a *Mozilla* clone it won't show some of the stuff on our GP practice's website.

With this all done my workstation was finally working pretty well. After my afternoon cup of tea I found the settings menu in the *Edge* browser and zoomed to the point where I could actually read the text on my own website – necessary because whatever functions I had used to set text size had left the pages very hard to read. I also did this latest edit in *Open Office Writer* rather than any other word-processor.

Alistair brought the boys over in time for tea and a sleep-over. That livened the atmosphere up considerably!

When I went in to shut the PC down I had the impression that everything was working much more quickly – applications opened more quickly and web pages were accessed in much shorter times.

### **Saturday 27 January 2018**

This was confirmed when I switched on after breakfast. Everything seems really sharp now. This is odd because the major changes I have made are only to install the new *Outlook* and change my default browser from *SeaMonkey* to *Edge*. I checked Pat's ID this morning and she too has the benefit of *Edge*, with 1&1 webmail working really well.

The PC which I had almost decided to dump and replace is transformed. I can only assume that old applications simply don't run well in *Windows 10*. Apart from *Office 2003* I have very little software that didn't come as part of *Windows*, so in effect I have a new computer. The one exception is my favourite old vector graphics programme. *Xara X*, which I bought for the NHS in South Derbyshire and of which I kept my backup CD, runs well but doesn't seem to behave quite as it used to. It has even stopped demanding a serial number before it will open!

Saturday was uneventful, though I did make a big beef-shin stew while Pat and Alistair took Ewan and Tom out and then back home.

The day ended with us watching a surprisingly good ITV programme about Rembrandt (we watched the first episode, on Michelangelo, earlier in the week) followed by the French crime series *Spiral*. We only managed the first of the two parts before going wearily off to bed.

## **Monday 29 January 2018**

We had an average Sunday, much of it taken up with the papers. We finished the Rembrandt programme and *Spiral* before getting into the routine Sunday-evening viewing. The high spot was the stew, livened up with some pre-cooked carrots.

I was mostly awake from about 5am this morning, physically feeling amazingly comfortable but restless mentally. I did nod off some time after the heating came on at 6am but was wide awake when it was time to get up at 7 o'clock. Today is Anton's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday and we are hoping to coax him out to the pub for lunch with Jackie and Bob after fitting two new lampshades which Pat has bought for his kitchen.

This morning's walk was difficult. The feet felt quite good when we set out but the left one had got very painful after about three minutes. Then the pain moved to the right one, but by the time we were nearing home both feet had eased. We finished the circuit in about 20 minutes, an estimate because I forgot to start the stopwatch when we set out.

Alistair stayed with a friend last night before starting work with Direct Line insurance today.

After writing the above, I visited a few external websites to see how well the PC was behaving. The BBC News home page arrived incredibly quickly in spite of being full of images. The new *Office* adoption of *Edge* seem to have supercharged what was becoming a moribund system.

Anton agreed to celebrate his birthday with us at his usual pub, so Jackie and Bob met us there and we had a very pleasant lunch. I learned how to produce good crispy chicken wings, not by roasting as I have been doing for a long time but by deep frying. I decided I should be able to get away with shallow frying in future.... The pub's food had improved considerably since last year, and my pint of IPA went down very well. I was so full that, later on, I decided on a slice of Christmas cake, some Lancashire cheese and a glass of port (from a very nice bottle which Bob brought belatedly for my birthday) for 'dinner'. Pat had a toasted teacake!

My feet were feeling pretty battered by bedtime, but I managed a decent read in bed.

## **Tuesday 30 January 2018**

My early-morning wakefulness, punctuated by visits to the loo, was quite comfortable and restful, without worries, and I could cheerfully have stayed in bed for another couple of hours, but I got up at 7:10am. Alistair was up and getting ready to leave for work, so no competition for the bathroom for this old stick-in-the-mud, who really would be upset if his morning routine was disrupted!

It was a pleasant, dry morning, if chilly at 3 degrees. My feet were feeling rather better than they did over the weekend and yesterday, and I was able to maintain a decent pace for our 19¼-minute walk. When I got back I realised that we should have stopped yesterday for some of Pat's low-sugar orange juice, so I put my jacket back on (without a sweatshirt!) and walked across to the OneStop Shop for two bottles of that and one of semi-skimmed. I felt no worse for the extra mileage.

After breakfast I had my customary wrestling match with the Tempur mattresses, fitted sheets and pillow-cases, all finished by 10am. Ujim Al-Khalili's *Life Scientific* was on Radio 4 and I was delighted to hear him say 'ri-SEARCH' in response to his interviewee's 'multiple' (another bloody Americanism) 'REE-search'es. I tweeted Jim to thank him – originally an Iraqi immigrant – for defending our language.

I have tried to get this diary copied as a *Word* document, in the hope that I can get rid of *OpenOffice*, but no joy so far. I tried to uninstall individual *OpenOffice* applications, but it seems that the package is one program. I selected *OpenOffice* at the top of the list of applications and it just opened this diary! A quick google revealed that *OpenOffice* is a single application with many faces. No problem: about a third of my miserable little internal drive is empty, so storage isn't a problem after all my activity.

I had to pop to the Co-op this afternoon for a few essential groceries and later put two large potatoes, rubbed with Utterly Butterly, in the microwave on its 'convection oven' setting at 220 degrees for an hour. Meanwhile the shin stew was on a very low gas to heat gently. Later on we ate the two jacket potatoes with stew and finished off some left-over remains of puddings before watching the second episode of *Silent Witness*, quite a bit of which I missed because I kept falling asleep.

I was able to read in bed for as long as I wanted but needed some gel before lying down.

### **Wednesday 31 January 2018**

I was up for a pee at around 3am but catnapped comfortably and happily until nearly 7am. I must have gone off for one more little nap before waking fully and getting up at 7:15. The morning was grey and drizzly. I managed to get downstairs in time for the 7:30 Radio 4 news summary and by the time we were ready for our walk the rain had stopped and the sky had brightened. We did an uneventful lap of the usual route in 19 minutes 56 seconds. My feet had been a little painful when we set out but felt quite good by the time we got home.

They were a whole lot more painful when, towards midday, I did another Sainsbury's run for various missing bits we needed for tonight's dinner and a top-up of diesel. The list was short so I didn't bother with a trolley, but I made trouble for myself by picking up a fairly big bag of dry dog food which wasn't on the list. My two shopping bags were quite heavy after checking out and both feet were really painful by the time I got back to the car.

Sitting down over two cups of coffee didn't help, but when I had had a little walk around and a few minutes on the office chair typing this they were feeling a lot better.

I defrosted four large salmon tail fillets bought from Morrisons recently and prepared two packs of the now-popular flat stringless green beans while Pat scrubbed and trimmed the new potatoes I had bought – very authentic, with real mud on them! She also made a crème fraîche sauce for the salmon and four little chocolate mousses for which I half-whipped some cream with a few drops of vanilla extract. I fried the fish two portions at a time, having dredged it with fine polenta. The fish cooked well but the polenta didn't. Otherwise, the meal went down well with all concerned.

The foot had been sore when sitting during the afternoon and was again during the evening, but I had a reasonable spell of reading in bed before lying down.

## Thursday 1 February 2018

With Al having to get up very early for work there was enough noise downstairs to disturb my early-morning doze, but I was incredibly comfortable and really enjoyed my time, getting up at 7:10 feeling quite fresh (a rarity). My feet felt fine as I dressed and went downstairs.

It was a lovely clear morning, but frosty and cold at about 3 degrees. We had a good 20-minute walk with no dodgy dog encounters and no real complaints from the feet, and I was sweating freely when we got home in spite of the cold.

After breakfast I fed Bailey three worming tablets moulded into balls of grated cheddar. Then I applied a pipette of flea-and-tick treatment. I have never seen worms when I have been picking up his poo and he hardly ever scratches these days, so these treatments are probably preventative rather than curative.

Pat was quite under the weather, without knowing quite why, so I prescribed a lazy day without ironing. I did a little lazing with her and it was only when I had sat in my recliner for a while that the left foot began feeling painful.

My daughter Sarah had been getting anxious about my delayed colonoscopy – much more so than I was – so I had to sort through the in-tray on the desk to find various letters from GPs and hospitals so that I could chase up the results from my cardio tests, in the hope of getting the colonoscopy re-scheduled. I got the number for the consultant cardiologist's secretary, who was really helpful. It seemed that the Bowel Cancer Screening team had been pestering her regularly, but the notes had not come from the clinic to the consultant. However, she had been told that they should finally be with her tomorrow, so things should start moving again.

Pat perked up later in the afternoon and tried to get some sense out of the finance company which Social Services have signed up to handle Anton's bills. They told her they were still paying her old company, who were fired by Julie Myers a while ago, and this diary really came into its own as I was able to search for Julie and find out exactly when she said she had sacked the 'old firm'.

She then made the last of the shin stew into a meat and potato pie, one of my favourites from childhood. Alistair got home in time for this, so we had a pleasant family dinner. When I said I needed to go to Aldi for – among other things – some inexpensive wine, he actually suggested that I get the same for him and he would reimburse me, having made a good attempt to drink me out of house and home!. To be fair, he and his friend had brought home a part-empty bottle of Gordon's pink gin on Wednesday and left what we didn't drink in the pantry.

The left foot behaved reasonably well through the evening's TV but hit me really hard after a short stretch of reading in bed: really severe, sharp pain in spite of two doses of Voltarol jelly. I walked up and down the bedroom and sat with the lower leg vertical, but as soon as I lay down the pain became severe. I usually lie on my right side so that my back is to Pat's light, but whatever I did with my left foot the pain flared up at once.

Eventually I decided to put up with the light, and I must have gone off to sleep very quickly.

### **Friday 2 February 2018**

I slept well without a long wakeful spell in the early morning until the bladder got me up, feeling quite fresh but a little disoriented, just after 7am. The morning was dull, and mild at 5 degrees, and we had a pleasant walk, starting out with my feet feeling quite good. By the time we got home, though, the right ankle was niggling a little, with an ache up the inside. Considering the appalling state of the ankle replacement, this was pretty mild!

I managed yet another shopping trip this morning, with a short list of stuff we needed from Aldi that turned into a £115 trolley-load! By the time I had emptied the trolley into the bags in the car boot, surrendered the trolley, driven home, unloaded the bags (one of which was probably the very heaviest I have ever brought home), helped Pat to stash the goods (which included two 6-bottle cases of Toro Loco red, one for me and one for Alistair) and made coffee, I was knackered and my feet were *really* protesting. The left one was even worse by the time I had sat drinking the coffee – first and second cups. The usual trick worked: stand up and walk around in stockinged feet for a few metres and then sit on the edge of the chair with the lower leg vertical for a few minutes, after which the pain had totally gone. This pattern is totally weird!

### **Monday 5 February 2018**

Our weekend was very uneventful, with little to remember – and certainly nothing to write about here! – this morning.

I had a strange and rather scary awakening this morning. I hadn't been awake very much through the early hours, as far as I could recall, but I checked the time at about 6:40 and told myself I could have another half-hour. Then I must have gone off into a very deep sleep, waking up suddenly in the middle of a vivid – if rather crazy – dream.

We were visiting a town centre somewhere with Pat's sister Jackie and her husband Bob. I was having some trouble with a strange camera – a fairly flat, square silver box, so we went into a camera shop where, for no obvious reason, everyone was doing something more appropriate to a visit to a Catholic cathedral, lighting tapers or paper spills from a candle to light another and then – not usual in churches – inhaling the resulting smoke. That was the point when I awoke with a jolt to see that it was now 7:15. I felt shaky and wobbly and slightly sick.

I was feeling better by the time I got downstairs and greeted the dog. Everything was quiet as Alistair had stayed overnight with friends on both Saturday and Sunday nights. By the time I had completed my ablutions and had a few swigs of tea I was feeling almost human, and we went out for our usual walk with the temperature at around one degree. The pavements were dry, so there were no traction problems, and we had no problems, only meeting the soft-coated shepherd and ignoring a silly little lapdog which was about to come out for a walk but decided to yap at Bailey first. Very small snowflakes started fluttering down soon after we set out, but nothing dramatic.

I don't seem to feel the cold the way I used to, either when walking in winter weather or when splashing my face and hair with icy cold water. Better circulation since I gave up smoking and excessive eating, or what?

We had a panic this morning as Pat had either mislaid or lost her keys, We did quite a search but could not find them. I hope they turn up because spare car keys are very expensive and I will have to change the lock barrels on the doors if they don't.

After Pat had left for Anton's I went upstairs for my usual sweaty wrestle with the bedding, after which I felt I had earned a generous cup of coffee - though, after leaving this diary untouched all weekend, I felt I should update it first.

After coffee I continued the key search, with no success, and later Pat and I carried it on, still with nothing to show. I examined every possible hiding place in the car - even under the bonnet - and even used my MagLite torch to look under and behind everything from the cabinet in the hall to the loo and the bidet - these two on the basis that, if I had had the keys in my trouser pocket and the trousers round my ankles and sat on either or both, the keys might well have fallen out into the gloomy spaces behind, but still no success.

We fitted a slice of rather dry Christmas cake (not enough feeding with cheap brandy before icing) and some decent Cheddar in as a quick lunch in the middle of all this and then carried on. We continued the search with added energy but no more success!

When Alistair got home we had dinner: the last of the latest batch of Mary Berry's Malaysian Chicken Fried Rice, followed in my case by some Kelly's Cornish ice cream sprinkled with good Canadian maple syrup.

Filling in time until *Silent Witness* and then watching it filled most of the evening.

## **Tuesday 6 February 2018**

I had a very restless night, mostly due to worrying about Pat's lost keys. I really believed that I had hardly slept at all, but I managed to catch a nap at around 6:45 and then snapped awake at 7:15, feeling less groggy than usual. Judging by how I felt later I must have slept quite a lot, so perhaps I dreamed about not sleeping!

Alistair was up and from the fragrance had obviously used the bathroom, but I think he must have had his earphones in because we didn't meet before Bailey and I went out and he was gone by the time we got home after an uneventful 20-minute 26-second walk. The local temperature was reported at minus-one but it was a clear, dry, frost-free morning which didn't feel very cold. My feet were moderately painful but soon settled down when we got home.

I managed a shower, a trip to the barber (no waiting for once!) and a call at the Co-op before lunchtime, and we spent quite a bit of the afternoon preparing a serious Cottage Pie for tomorrow night - Pat on the meat and me on the mash. That allowed us to have a fairly lazy afternoon with our books.

Once this was done I lit the fire, which Pat had decided to lay while I was out (she is no respecter of lines of demarcation!). As I didn't know what paper and kindling she had used I had to nurse the fire for a long time, and I got quite stiff, so when I finally tried to get up off the floor I had a real struggle and experienced a horrendous blast of pain in the left ankle. It felt as if something really had given, but the pain soon subsided.

Dinner was fish fingers with tiny new potatoes and mushy peas, followed by ice-cream and maple syrup again for me.

I had no serious pain problems and was able to read in bed for quite a long time without discomfort, so I ended the day with no anti-inflammatory gel at all.

### **Wednesday 7 February 2018**

I lost count of the number of pees that came between a long, restful sleep and getting up at 7:15. I can't understand why I get this sequence of bladder niggles after sleeping well for hours without needing the loo.

The feet felt quite good when I got up. It was a beautiful clear morning, cold at -1 degree and slightly breezy, so I did get more chilled than usual. The legs and back felt stiff when we set out and each ankle in turn had a spell of pain (I must do another round of exercises today). The ground was a very long way down at both the poo stops and I was aware that I was walking very slowly. The stopwatch confirmed this, clocking almost 22 minutes. The pains had eased by the time I had laid the table but I was quite relieved to sit down and write this. After sitting for a while, though, it was quite painful to get up and walk around.

As usual, Bailey was on patrol, waiting patiently for Pat to come down for breakfast. The moment came, and he went off into one of his insane multi-lap races round the house, reducing both of us to helpless laughter. Then I noticed that Pat was wearing a very smug, self-satisfied expression. She nodded to indicate that I should look down at the table. I did, and there was her missing key-ring!

She had been feeling her way through all the jackets at one end of her wardrobe, stroking down them and shaking them, and she heard a rattle and felt a bulge as she tested a suede jacket. She put her hand in the pocket, and there were her keys. Her best guess as to why they were there was that, in preparation for meeting her cousin Judy in Sheffield a couple of Sundays ago, she had put them in her pocket in case I drank too much and needed a relief driver. Then, when the gathering was cancelled due to snow, she had simply hung the jacket back up, keys and all. Typically, they waited to turn up after I had phoned the police to report their loss yesterday.

I chopped some more wood, focusing on the need for plenty of thin kindling, because last night a couple of hefty logs were refusing to burn and I had no livelier fuel to drop in round them. I was quite surprised that there was hardly a trace of either when I cleared the grate: they must have smouldered away when we went to bed.

My main task today was to make a lemon syllabub as dessert after the cottage pie for dinner. In preparation, I printed the recipe from my own website before breakfast and got out opened bottles of French Muscat and

Sainsbury's Cognac. I needed to put all the ingredients and utensils in the freezer to chill, which I did, leaving them for about half an hour, and then pared the zest off the lemon and sliced it finely, juiced the lemon (putting the juice through a fine tea strainer) and mixed everything with caster sugar, sweet wine and Cognac. The result went into the fridge to be blended with the cream, which was already in the fridge, later.

The syllabub wasn't quite as firm as I would have liked but it went down very well with all concerned. I will have to whisk it a little more next time.

By bedtime, after watching *Silent Witness*, I was feeling very stiff indeed, with sore feet and a really nasty pain down the inside of my left thigh from the groin. I took two Paracetamol and one Naproxen before bed. I was able to read for a reasonable time but needed a rub of Voltarol gel before going to sleep.

### **Thursday 8 February 2018**

I had a fairly long wakeful period this morning after a reasonable night's sleep, thinking about what to do for Valentine's Day next Wednesday, listening for clues as to when Alistair and his pal would be finished with the bathroom. I got up at 7:10 and found all quiet downstairs. The visitor had left for work but Alistair was shut in his room, presumably to avoid a dog invasion (at bedtime last night Bailey had gone to his door and looked at me as if to ask me to open the door!).

It was slightly milder this morning at 2 degrees with light cloud after a red sunrise, but there was enough breeze to chill my fingers when we got out. My feet were still feeling a bit battered and there was a faint echo of last night's groin pain, but we got round the loop in about 20½ minutes with one poo-stop.

Apart from getting the felling axe into action to top up the log baskets, the day was pretty uneventful. I laid the fire, but in the end we decided not to light it as we felt comfortably warm indoors.

When Alistair got home we ate the remaining cottage pie and green beans in Spanish style tomato sauce. I had the one remaining portion of lemon syllabub, as there was no competition for it.

### **Friday 9 February 2018**

My bladder had me out of bed several times around daybreak, which was annoying because the rest of my body was blissfully comfortable. Lying face down I was just as relaxed facing either way with one leg cocked and the other straight, and with one arm stretched out past my head and the other curled round in front of my face. Amazingly, lying down, there was only a faint ache in the ankles – nothing else at all. When I got out of bed at 7:10am I was walking easily, completely without pain.

The morning was bright, with light cloud and a hint of a red dawn. The temperature was 4 degrees, quite comfortable for our walk, which was more than I could say for my legs and feet, which felt quite battered. We completed the circuit without problems in 20 minutes 40 seconds, slightly slower than yesterday thanks only to an extra poo-stop.

Pat's back was badly in spasm when she came downstairs, so she didn't rush into any activity, and at coffee time I gave her one of the two big



tubes of Ibuprofen gel which I have received on prescription (the GP wouldn't give me Voltarol).

I had finally been given an appointment for an Exercise Test (heart monitoring while pounding a treadmill), but this turned out to clash with meeting Rachel's care team, so I phoned the Cardio-Respiratory Department at Bassetlaw and they cheerfully moved my appointment back a week to the 27 February in spite of Pat's shock that I would even consider changing it. Once that has been done and the results have been sent to the GP, I should finally be able to get the blasted Colonoscopy booked.

My feet and legs were pretty painful for most of the day.

We have Alistair's boys for a sleepover tonight and have decided to have a variety of takeaways from the local pizza place. I decided to pick up a menu when they open (not until 4:30pm) when I go across to the shops to get some Ibuprofen tablets for Pat. They also do fried chicken, kebabs and various other genres, so there will be plenty of choice for everyone. In the event we put together a short shopping list, including some treats for the boys, and I decided to go to Asda rather than our local Co-op. I found everything we needed there, though slowly as I am not as familiar with their layout as I am with Sainsburys' and the Co-op's, including two packets of 16 Ibuprofen.

We had no idea what time Alistair and the boys would arrive, as he had to drive from work in Doncaster all the way to Buxton and then back here, which would take at least 1¼ hours. It was pretty late in the end but we managed to order a takeaway from The pizza place and had a reasonable dinner of pizzas and fried chicken.

### **Saturday 10 February 2018**

We got a decent lie-in this morning before the boys came up to visit us and had a generally enjoyable day together, with a game of Triominoes (I won) and an aborted game of Scrabble and then reheated leftovers from last night for lunch after Alistair and Pat had taken the boys into town to do a bit of shopping.

He planned to get them back to Buxton fairly early, but the plan was complicated by Julie asking him to bring his bike down here as it was taking up a lot of space. This meant using our car as Alistair's C2 is much too small. I offered to drive but Pat insisted on doing it, so I had a lazy afternoon with a rather substandard supernatural thriller starring Anthony Hopkins as a downmarket exorcist. When this was finished I decided to do my accounts, updating my bank account projection spreadsheet from my credit card websites – a tedious task but encouraging in that I seem to have absorbed most of the Christmas extravagance and we should start March in reasonably good shape.

Alistair was having a sleepover somewhere and left before dinner-time, leaving us to the TV and a huge store of recorded stuff, ending with part one of *Modus*, the latest Swedish offering on BBC4.

My feet and legs seemed to enjoy the lazing around, and were much less painful than they were yesterday. I had an easy read in bed without the help of gel.

## **Sunday 11 February 2018**

We had a lovely long lie-in this morning, staying in bed until almost 10am with the house to ourselves. I went for the paper and Anton's milk while Pat made a monster batch of porridge, and then we watched the rest of *Modus*. My recordings had failed for some reason but the BBC iPlayer delivered the goods perfectly.

At around 4pm I lit the fire, as it was a pretty cold afternoon. We had found an unopened Morrisons chicken tikka masala in the freezer, as well as a couple of naans, so all I had to do was cook some rice.

It was a decent Sunday night on TV, watching *Call the Midwife* among other things and saving *Endeavour* for tonight.

My legs and feet didn't require any pain control before bed.

## **Monday 12 February 2018**

I had a long restless spell before getting up, but not dictated by my bladder. The new log shows five pees two nights ago, just two the following night and three last night. I have no idea why I was so restless from around 4am onwards.

I got up at 7:05, walking on fairly comfortable feet. It was a beautiful bright morning but with a temperature of just one degree Celsius and some wind. By the time Bailey and I had done the first 200-metre leg of the walk the top of my left instep was getting quite sore, but I managed to get round the loop in 22 minutes 15 seconds.

After breakfast I took the Vax cleaner upstairs and did my usual Monday morning chore, vacuuming the mattresses (which I forgot until the sheets were on, so I vacuumed the sheets!), wrestling the sheets on and changing the duvet cover. Our beds and bedding are wonderfully comfortable, but bloody hard work to maintain. Finally, I vacced the bedroom's sumptuous carpet and had a shower and shave. That left time to have a coffee and biscuits with Pat and Bailey before she went off to see Anton.

I had a second coffee and gave Bailey his biscuits while watching some Winter Olympics. I had been charged to stay within earshot of the doorbell because Pat is waiting for a parcel, so I deferred other odd jobs like checking backup stocks of kitchen foil and clingfilm. This meant using the Nisbets website, where I discovered that I couldn't change the email address they hold for me (I changed mine from '.com' to '.co.uk' a while ago to get rid of the deluge of junk mail I was getting). All the other fields on my account page were editable, but not the email address. I emailed Nisbets customer service and technical help addresses for help. The replies came later: open a new account and ask them to merge the two.

I went to my annual health check appointment at 5:20pm. There were a few questions, I was weighed and my blood pressure was measured. My blood tests were done in December so no more were needed.

We had spaghetti with leftover mince from last week's cottage pie, which made a very acceptable pasta sauce when let down with a small amount of water and laced with a little pesto.

The evening's entertainment time was pretty well filled with *Endeavour* (the young Morse). Pat went up early and I watched a David Attenborough programme about ichthyosaur fossils before retiring.

I did need some ibuprofen gel before lying down, but the feet had recovered quite well from the state they were in after this morning's walk.

## **Tuesday 13 February 2018**

I got up at 7:10 this morning after a decent night's sleep with only two visits to the loo, to a crisp, clear morning with a red sunrise showing in the East. The catch was a brisk, very cold wind at 2 degrees. My feet felt far better than they had yesterday and we got round the loop without incident in 21 minutes 17 seconds. Sitting down to write this after laying up for breakfast both legs and feet were quite comfortable – fortunate because my morning project is to go into town and shop for tomorrow night's Valentine's dinner, catching up on routine stuff while I am there.

I got a text from ParcelForce before breakfast telling me that yesterday's Nisbets order would be delivered between 12:15 and 1:15, and it was – pretty swift!

After breakfast I went into town to get the Valentine's shopping, mostly from M&S. We will be having a sumptuous dinner tomorrow night: a starter of Coquilles St-Jacques, very high-quality fillet steak with rosemary potatoes, mushrooms and petits pois and a choice of ready-made desserts – all from M&S. On the way back I visited Sainsbury's for some more mundane stuff, and when I got home I put a bottle of Prosecco in the fridge.

All this was interrupted by a phone-call from Alistair, saying he would be back at around 1pm because he had to visit the doctor. It turned out that he had been coughing blood at work – something that sounded ominous after his parathyroid surgery. He did say, though, that a friend had also developed a bad cough, so it may be that violent coughing damaged some of his scars. The doctor took some samples and told him to rest for a couple of days. He has a routine appointment on Monday at the hospital where his surgery was done, but in the meantime he insisted on ignoring the doctor's orders and going back in to work and staying with a friend. Unsurprisingly, Pat was very concerned but he wouldn't listen to good sense. It looks as if our Valentine's Day dinner will be a gloomy affair, though with the house to ourselves.

At around 3pm my left foot suddenly started hurting quite violently. I had a tube of prescription Ibuprofen gel to hand and applied a generous dollop. To my amazement the pain vanished almost instantly. Maybe this stuff is actually better than Voltarol...?

Once the pain had subsided I decided to light the woodburner, hoping that the wood I had left from the last outing with the felling axe would keep the fire alive until bedtime. It did – just!

Before bed, after Pat had gone up and I had cleaned my teeth in the downstairs bathroom – a strategy I use because she insists on adorning our beds with about six or seven ornamental cushions every day, in spite of the fact that nobody goes up there except us, and it really irritates me to have to take them off and stack them before I can get into bed! - I went

out and brought in the beautiful bunch of red roses which I bought this morning from M&S. I got a wine cooler out of the utility room and put water in it to keep the flowers fresh and put it on the kitchen table along with the Valentine's card I bought, also from M&S.

I had no trouble with the feet when I got into bed.

### **Wednesday 14 February 2018 – Valentine's Day**

I had a long period of napping this morning, and when 7:05 arrived I felt quite unwell, with a very dry mouth and a muzzy head. This is usual in the mornings, but today was much worse than usual. I wonder if I am getting dehydrated during the night because I only take a sip of water after each loo visit – only two last night, so very little water indeed. I did have a full glass of milk before bed, though.

I drank the remaining water in my glass before putting it away in the ensuite, and by the time I had drunk my first cup of tea I felt a lot better.

It was a beautiful but very frosty morning with a temperature of -1 Celsius and almost no wind. We did the usual circuit in 21 minutes 16 seconds – just one second faster than yesterday, in spite of the fact that my feet and legs felt quite weary and mildly painful before we set out and the battering Bailey gave my left foot. We were passing a solid wooden fence when he heard or smelled something in the garden behind it, let out a violent bark and leaped at the fence, sending a powerful jolt up the lead which did something nasty to the foot when I tried to put the brakes on. It was very painful the rest of the way round but soon eased when I had sat down for a few minutes with a couple of Paracetamols and another cup of tea.

We exchanged presents and cards after breakfast. My present was combined with one for my birthday, and was absolutely amazing. I knew Pat had been looking at foie gras but had not expected her to go completely crazy with a whole goose liver weighing 300 grams (roughly 10 ounces) in a small French equivalent of a Kilner jar, from the French supplier, Castaing, used by Harrods! It is produced in St-Sever in the far south-west of France. The use-by date is one year from yesterday but the instruction is 'Once opened, keep in fridge and eat shortly'. I wonder if I could slice it and freeze the slices – you can do that with terrines, after all: we have habitually come back from France with duck and goose rillettes, country pâtés and other goodies and kept these in the freezer for months or even years! There are even mousses de canard and d'oie, which are pretty much liver pâtés, and we have frozen them, too. Or must I just eat some for lunch, or as a starter at dinner, every day until it has all gone? A bit of googling revealed that some foie gras is sold frozen but I found no information on home freezing.

I lit the fire fairly late in the afternoon but did not need to keep it going strongly because the weather was beginning to get milder. It was about 6 degrees at bedtime.

I opened a well-chilled bottle of Prosecco for an appetiser while I cooked.

The fillet steak from M&S was very disappointing – dry and chewy, even though I cooked it quite rare. Pat's was a little more tender than mine, but still not very appetising. The rest of the meal was very enjoyable, though – especially the tartes au citron and the little Black Forest cakes.

## Thursday 15 February 2018

I drank a full large glass of milk before going to bed last night, and after my second pee at sometime after 6am I topped my water glass up and drank most of it. I was really reluctant to wake up fully, let alone to *get* up. I was warm and comfortable but didn't feel quite well. I still managed to get up between 7:05 and 7:10, though, and began to feel better as I dressed and went downstairs. A cup of tea helped me to come to.

My routine visit to the loo was stressful. Yesterday morning, with a lot of hard straining, I managed to pass a stool that must have been nearly the size and shape of a golf ball with – unsurprisingly – some blood. Today I had to push even harder but the result broke up as it emerged and there was no blood. However, I think part of a pile was left hanging out and had to be tucked back in when I applied my usual Savlon ointment. Something is definitely not right in my colon. I have my cardio exercise test on the 27<sup>th</sup> and then, all being well, I should get my colonoscopy fairly quickly. Then all will be revealed... Meanwhile I need to take something to help soften my stools. Baked beans on wholemeal toast for lunch will be a good start! I will also re-read the leaflet in my back of Senna tablets.

It was a lovely morning with the temperature reported to be 6 degrees. My feet weren't feeling brilliant when I got up and by the time we had been walking for ten minutes they were getting very painful indeed. I considered turning round to cut the walk short, but I persevered and we got round in just under 23 minutes, by far the longest time for several weeks. I was very relieved to get home and took two Paracetamols and a Naproxen, and by the time I had laid the table for breakfast the feet were feeling better – and better still when I had sat and typed this.

I had a lunch of foie gras, which had been left out on a plate for about an hour to take it to room temperature which improved the texture and flavour tremendously, and Le Rustique Camembert, which was perfectly ripe straight from Sainsbury's. I then paid a quick visit to the Co-op for Crème Fraîche (I got the Yeo Valley product, the same brand as the yogurt I have for breakfast every day), which we needed for the Stroganoff which we planned to make with the leftover fillet steaks. (I only discovered when Pat started cooking that the Crème Fraîche was half-fat!) I looked for DulcoEase, the stool softener, but they didn't have it. I called in at our local pharmacy, and neither did they.

When I got back I did a little research and concluded that one or more of my Omeprazole (taken to prevent excess stomach acid when taking anti-inflammatories), Cetirizine (the anti-histamine prescribed for 'mild allergic rhinitis) and Tamsulosin (used to moderate my nocturnal peeing) might be contributing to various adverse symptoms which are bothering me. I decided to stop all of them for a while as of tonight. This may be rash as I have recently found it more difficult to 'hold my water' until I can stop what I'm doing and get to the loo!

The Stroganoff was very tasty, although something went wrong with my portion control for the rice, leaving very little to box up for Anton on Monday.

I took none of my prescribed medication but did take two Senna tablets to loosen my bowels.

The feet were quite comfortable through the evening and after I got into bed.

### **Friday 16 February 2018**

I logged five visits to the loo through the night after leaving the evening's Tamsulosin capsule. This was high, but it was actually the same as my score on the first night of the new logging routine. I drank my whole glass of water and refilled the glass sometime around 6am.

I did feel a little less 'frowsty', as my parents would have described the way I have felt recently, and the dry mouth was a lot better.

My early-morning trip to the loo, in spite of feeling that I really needed it, was an ordeal. It took a long time to get anything moving, and when I finally managed to shift something it was very painful and there was blood on the paper again. There was very little visible in the pan, so I assumed that most of the output had found its way into the S-bend!

It was a lovely morning, clear, sunny and windless, but cold at one degree. We had a pleasant walk with no difficult doggy encounters, but my left leg was rather stiff. I couldn't decide whether the pain was local or from the sciatic nerve, but it wasn't serious enough to cause real grief.

Alistair was back home when we got back, unable to make a sound thanks to his throat infection.

We had baked beans on toast for lunch.

I took the 1-kilo pack of chicken wings, which I bought when I visited Sainsbury's after M&S on Tuesday, out of the freezer for tonight. I wanted to try frying them rather than roasting, but when evening came we both agreed that we didn't feel like eating a cooked dinner and made do with half a bowl of cold leftover baked beans (me), some cheese and crackers and a piece of Christmas cake (me again), all washed down with a glass of wine (both).

### **Sunday 18 February 2018**

My bladder has been playing up badly for the past few days, and this started well before I stopped taking Tamsulosin. It had reached the pitch where I only had to do anything at all wet, such as pouring a cup of tea, to be struck by an irresistible urge to pee. This was so far beyond my control that I passed on Pat's suggestion of visiting the Retford framers' market and suggested that Alistair accompanied her instead. He had mentioned that he wanted to go Retford market, so that made sense for all of us.

Yesterday I developed what felt like a bout of hay fever, so this morning I re-started the Cetirizine and the nasal irritation subsided quite quickly.

So far the Senna tablets (and perhaps the baked beans and mushy peas) have kept my bowel function in order. We had steak pies from the Dexter butcher for dinner, with mashed potatoes and mushy peas to keep up the good work (I hope).

This morning we had a visit from Aidan and Donni, which triggered an urge in Pat to make bacon, egg and mushroom sandwiches. She catered very generously, making it unlikely that we would have a hot dinner tonight.

My legs felt sore and weary when I had been for the papers this morning, but the feet and ankles were more-or-less pain-free once this had worn off. I don't think I have used any anti-inflammatory gel for a day or two, in spite of odd twinges.

### **Monday 19 February 2018**

The cheap plastic digital watch's stopwatch decided not to work this morning, but I was able to log the departure and return times from my Casio and calculate our walking time at approximated 20 minutes. It was surprisingly warm at 9 degrees, with a very light and fine drizzle. My legs and feet were aching mildly, but nothing to hinder me.

I had forgotten to put poo bags in my pocket so Bailey's first, fairly firm poo had to be gathered up in a large sheet of kitchen roll. The second, softer one required some dodgy work with handfuls of wet dead leaves.

After Pat had gone to Anton's I spent most of the morning trying to get the Address of Rachael's care service into the new Garmin satnav. It is far less intuitive than our older, smaller unit, so I had to refer to the online User Guide.

The back end of the morning was spent sorting out my many GP and hospital letters and making sure my various appointments were entered in the *Outlook* calendar on the PC. My next one is the treadmill exercise test for my heart on the 27 February. Once that is on the record the Bowel Cancer Screening Team should be able to schedule my colonoscopy – lovely!

### **Wednesday 21 February 2018**

The diary has got a bit chaotic this week, and looks like staying the same way for a while. I didn't record anything for yesterday as we had a long meeting with Rachael, who runs the company providing Anton's carers and at whose offices on the outskirts of the city we met, and his new social worker, a pleasant South Londoner called Dave. We moved things forward quite well, getting Pat off the hook as regards taking over control of Anton's finances. We discovered that Sheffield City Council has an entity called Executor Services which can do this instead, so why Pat has been under all this pressure I have no idea. She is still lumbered with a lever-arch file full of his financial information, but we hope to be able to hand this over soon.

On the way home we stopped at Morrisons for some shopping and had superb fish-and-chips for lunch at Whitby's. We both had a calamari starter and a drink – Peroni beer for me and Prosecco for Pat – followed by haddock, chips and mushy peas. We finished with a shared banana split, so by the time we got home we were feeling very lazy.

This morning a real bombshell dropped with a phone-call from the friend with whom Alistair has been staying for a few days. He had been ambulated to Pinderfields hospital in Wakefield before leaving for work, because his vision and motor control had gone haywire. This had been diagnosed by the paramedics as a probable stroke.

I woke Pat to let her know and took Bailey for his walk. But my legs and feet were feeling really painful after yesterday's antics in Sheffield, so I

turned back after ten minutes, doing far less distance than usual in the standard time of 20 minutes.

Pat was at her wits' end when she heard the news about Alistair, particularly as his father had had his first stroke at almost the same age.

We spent most of the day waiting for news, with me slotting in a trip to Sainsbury's and Aldi to buy ingredients for our contributions to Barney's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebration on Friday evening. Then, shortly before 3pm, we had a call to say Alistair's blood-pressure had dropped sharply and he was feeling better.

He hadn't had a stroke but possibly a Transient Ischaemic Attack like the one Pat had many years ago with not long-term ill-effects – I think it involves something like little clots passing through the brain's blood vessels, causing temporary problems until they move on

We arranged to visit him towards the end of tomorrow morning, and Pat felt able to get back to making and decorating Barney's birthday cake.

A little after 6pm we learned that his vision had improved and he was managing to do some drawing.

We were both busy sorting out stuff for Barney-Fest. Pat was doing some advanced cake decoration with music-themed rice paper. I had the tasks of making an anonymous-looking brown paper parcel of 21 bars of his favourite chocolate and finding a bottle bag for the whisky which his parents had approved. I designed and printed what I thought were witty labels for both.

### **Friday 23 February 2018**

Yesterday was taken up with the planned visit to Alistair at Pinderfields Hospital and cooking for Barney's party tonight.

The first, after the new sat-nav had done a great job getting us to the hospital, was a surprise as they were just discharging him as we arrived. We ended up having coffee in the café with him and a friend and making tentative arrangements for him to drive back down here this morning.

By dinner-time we had managed to cook dozens of sausage rolls, wings and drumsticks, and were so knackered that we settled for a few of the little sausage rolls and, in my case, for a couple of mince pies, mine with red wine and port respectively. We then settled down to watch a whole Season 1 of the comedy series *Mum* before collapsing into bed, quite exhausted.

I got up at 7:15 this morning – bright but very cold at -2 degrees – and was quite surprised that my weary, aching legs and feet got me round the usual walk route in a respectable 21½ minutes. I was still feel quite tired after breakfast.

Alistair got back here later with a GP appointment which ended up being very long and busy. Clearly the doctor was very concerned about what stress was doing to Al's physical health. Afterwards, he managed to drive to Buxton and back to collect his boys, who were here but asleep when we got back from Barney's 21<sup>st</sup> party, which went really well. I only drank two small beers so decided not to ask Pat to drive us home.



Pat's beautiful cake, her sausage rolls and my drumsticks and wings went down really well, and we got round to singing *Happy Birthday* before heading home at around 10:30pm. This was a drive of 30-40 minutes more-or-less across Sheffield – from Loxley down to the A61 leading into town, a skirt round the edge of town onto the Parkway and then to the M1 South, picking up the A57 for Worksop at junction 31 and doing a quick skip across country to home. We were looking forward to a good long rest, though mine was interrupted by five trips to the loo leaving me feeling quite weary in the morning! My latest two-week record sheet showed nights with from two to six pee-stops.

### **Saturday 24 February 2018**

Pat got up before me this morning as she was going out with Al and the boys, first to something called Laser Labyrinth (another live-action digital shoot-'em-up game and then into town for some shopping and to get some passport photos done. I was feeling very tired and chose not to join in, opting instead for a lazy morning (apart from writing this). Al said he would not be signed back on for work for some time and would be staying with a friend when he had taken the boys home.

We caught up with some 'box sets' on TV during the afternoon and decided to have a snack supper rather than dinner.

### **Monday 26 February 2018**

Our Sunday lie-in was interrupted by a call from our lovely French 'daughter' Karine, confirming details for her forthcoming visit. Brunch was a real treat – half a dozen freshly delivered eggs from Millie's hens across the road, scrambled with a packet of top-of-the-range smoked salmon from Morrisons. Delicious! Then a lazy start to the day with the papers, until Pat had a sudden urge to catch up on housework and I ended up cutting firewood, laying the fire and then vacuuming and mopping the kitchen floor. The rest of the day was lazy, though.

I felt rough before getting up this morning. Perhaps missing two weekend lie-ins hadn't agreed with me, or maybe it was dehydration – I don't know, but once I was up I felt better. The dire threats of the weather forecasts had not been fulfilled yet – there was just a slight dusting of fine, powdery snow which didn't interfere with our walk at all. My feet were interfering, though, with a sore spot on the outside of the right heel (the one with the 'catastrophically failed' Total Ankle Replacement) which developed into more serious pain as we walked but did not stop me finishing the usual route in 21¼ minutes.

Pat was giving Anton a miss today. I wasn't quite sure but was glad she was taking the weight off a little. She did embark on a mammoth spell with the iron, though, and might have been better off at Anton's!

After breakfast I did my usual wrestling with mattresses and fitted sheets and then did a modest shop at the Co-op. The legs and ankles felt pretty weary by the time I had got three heavy bags in from the car. A light lunch of crackers, Camembert and a Frankfurter with a cup of tea got me through the afternoon, and at around 3:30 I did my neck, shoulder and back exercises. The shoulders have become quite painful and really do need regular workouts.

Alistair has been missing since he took the boys home on Saturday but has a doctor's appointment here tomorrow. I have my cardiac exercise test tomorrow afternoon.

I actually cooked a meal this evening: seared Dexter rib-eye steaks with boiled new potatoes, mushrooms and fried onions. The steaks weren't as good as I had expected but I quite enjoyed mine, to be followed by a slice of the delicious chocolate cake Pat made for Barney's party, drizzled with cream.

In spite of the ankle pain this morning I was fairly comfortable through the evening and got to bed without using any gel.

## **Tuesday 27 February 2018**

I was awake for quite a long time in the early morning, feeling very comfortable after yesterday's exercises, and found myself wondering why I had got into the habit of getting up at around 7am. I think it dates back to when I started my morning walks after being told I was borderline for Type 2 Diabetes.

Between looking out of the en-suite window while peeing and getting downstairs to the kitchen a light sprinkling of powdery snow had started. There had been some earlier because there was a little on the outbuilding roofs. It had stopped by the time we left for the walk. The temperature was about -1 degree but with bone-dry air I was quite comfortable without gloves.

My feet were pretty painless compared with yesterday, so the walk was quite pleasant. The snow had stopped by the time we got home in about a minute less than yesterday. By 8:30, when I set the table for breakfast, the snow was beginning to look a bit more convincing, with larger flakes and more of them. I began to wonder whether I would get to the hospital and back again this afternoon...

By 9:30, when Alistair arrived, the snow had stopped, but twenty minutes later, when I had finished cleaning the fireplace and laying the fire for tonight, there were some big, heavy, dark-grey clouds moving in from the East. They looked capable of delivering some serious snow. I made a fresh pot of Java coffee ready for the morning break.

The snow went on alternating between moderately heavy with large flakes and much lighter with tiny ones. Just before 11am the sun came out and stayed out for quite a while.

I left to go to the hospital for my 1pm appointment at about 12:15pm, getting there while the weather was reasonable and the roads were just wet. I had a long walk from the outpatients car park (free because somebody appeared to have torn the ticket-issuing machine off its mountings and the barriers were up) to the main entrance and then down various corridors to the Cardio-Respiratory Department, stopping for a pee before I signed in. It was nearer 1:15 when I was called. A pleasant young woman – a technician, I assumed, and almost certainly Polish so good luck with barmy bloody BREXIT! – fitted me up with a huge array of sticky ECG electrodes and took my blood pressure. Then I got on a large treadmill machine which she started slowly and with very little slope and gradually wound up. Considering the state of my legs and feet I was quite pleased

with how hard I managed to climb – and I think the ladies were, too! I was thoroughly out-of-breath by the time she stopped the machine. My resting blood pressure at the end was quite low.

When I stepped out of the main entrance (after another pee) I had to stop to zip up my ski-jacket, because a strong, cold wind had blown up from somewhere and it had started snowing again. I took the urban route rather than the country road out of town and back to the village, feeling pleased with how my old body, especially the lower extremities, had stood up to the treadmill's pressure. Later, at about 3pm, I got off the office chair intending to walk up to the Post Office to post Pat's driving licence renewal, but as soon as I stood up I realised that this would probably be a bit ambitious and took the car instead.

With the temperature at about 1 degree and forecast to hit -4 by midnight, I decided to get the fire lit before our 4pm cuppa. I had cleaned the stove out and laid the paper and kindling earlier, so a quick application of the gas-lighter would be all this needed. Pat, rather puritannically, said this would be wasteful if there was nobody in the sitting room, so I postponed lighting-up time. However, I did set the central heating to stay on all night to protect the pipes – and us.

I lit the fire at about 5:30 and by 6 there was a lovely glowing bed of wood embers that threw out masses of heat when the stove door was opened.

As it got dark, there was patchy lying snow all over the garden. The snow had stopped but there were some pretty threatening clouds away to the south.

### **Wednesday 28 February 2018**

I had a three-pee night and a restless period from before 6am. It wasn't snowing then and nothing significant seemed to have come down through the night. However, when I got up at 7:05 (my usual time) it was snowing, and this went on steadily, flakes changing in size and quantity, and wind increasing and decreasing. The result was a lot more snow on the ground than had been there at 6 o'clock. Between 6 and 7 I had heard the bin lorry and just one big delivery vehicle. Otherwise everything was still outside.

As I wrote this at 8:20 the snow is was close to stopped as it had been since 7, and by 8:30 the sky had brightened and the snow had stopped completely.

I decided as soon as I got down to cancel today's walk. The ground surfaces had been quite wet at nightfall and I thought there might be quite a thick layer of hard ice under the new snow, which would be a treacherous combination without crampons!

The snow continued erratically through the morning. Shortly before 10 o'clock Pat said she was worried that our green wheelie bin was still out on the pavement, so – in spite of the fact that we were in the middle of a really heavy hower – I agreed to go out and bring it in. I put gloves on but not a jacket over my sweatshirt. By the time I had moved the other bin out of the way, brought the green one in and rearranged the two side-by-

side, I was pretty well covered in snow. A few minutes later the snow had stopped!

With the temperature still around -2 degrees, I was amazed that I wasn't feeling the cold at all. I am sure I remember getting much colder in the early days of my walking programme, and even getting chilled when I splashed my face from the cold tap in the mornings. I was quite a bit heavier in those days and my circulation must have been much worse than it is now.

I have just checked and found that I was diagnosed as borderline for Type 2 Diabetes in July 2009 and started my walking and weight reduction more-or-less immediately.

The snow started and stopped repeatedly through the rest of the morning. At one stage it was fine powder blowing horizontally. It looked more like thick fog than snow. Towards midday it died down and by 12:30 the sun was shining. By this time the lying snow was at least three inches deep.

For the rest of the day the snow was fairly steady. I started the fire fairly early in the afternoon and kept it going until we retired to bed. The bedroom and bedclothes were pretty chilly but we soon got warm under our Pure White Russian Goose Down duvet!

### **Thursday 1 March 2018**

It was well below zero and obviously going to be another walk-free morning, so I stayed in bed until 8am, when it was snowing moderately. I let the dog out (briefly!), took Pat a cup of tea in bed as soon as I was downstairs, set up for breakfast and waited for her to appear.

She has completed an online passport renewal in the last couple of days and needed to post her old one back using whatever has replaced recorded-delivery post. We were beginning to run a little short of milk, and also needed prescriptions collecting, so I decided to brave the weather and the snow underfoot. I got my mighty Asolo mountain boots out and tracked down one pair each of my superb red knee-length and ankle-length Anapurna climbing socks, souvenirs from the very first holiday Wife Number Two and I took in the Scottish Highlands while we were still living in West Cornwall (an epic indeed!), and still almost as good as new. It wasn't easy to get the double socks and stiff boots on my dodgy feet, especially the (almost) non-flexing left one, but I managed in the end. I put on a sweatshirt and a fleece scarf under my lovely quilted ski jacket, pulled on fleece-lined sueded gloves and set out bravely. The boots gripped well on the hard-frozen remains of many footprints. I was aware of a fiercely cold wind behind me as I walked westwards, and as I turned various corners to get to the Post Office it hit me in the right ear and then in the left as I walked back towards the shop and the pharmacy. After the final left turn, it was right in my face all the way home! I remembered the poem saying something like 'the East wind doth blow and we shall have snow'. I thought this East wind must have come second and picked up its chill from already-fallen snow! Ouch!!!

My feet stood up to the boots on the irregularly packed snow but I was very glad to get them off when I got home. I kept the long socks on, though, and they made my walking shoes really comfortable when I put them back on!

My reward for managing the three tasks was coffee with a modest glass of Cognac.

By about 12:30 the wind had dropped and the snow had stopped, so – wearing only a sweatshirt over my polo – I went out and filled the carrying basket with split boards and offcuts. By 1pm the fire was laid and the hearth vacuumed, with a decent reserve stock of wood in the conservatory.

As I write this, I can smell the warming leek-and-potato soup which Pat is making. This was very welcome with a crusty baguette at lunchtime.

### **Friday 2 March 2018**

I lay awake for a long time before getting up just before 8 o'clock this morning. There seems to be a pattern developing in which I feel rather groggy once I am awake and until I get up and into action. This makes lie-ins less pleasant than they usually are.

The temperature was about -2 degrees, but my feet felt cosy when I had put the long Anapurna socks on.

I had emptied the dishwasher by the time Pat came down and my head seemed to have settled down enough to allow me to enjoy my breakfast of muesli, prunes and Yeo Valley yogurt.

Towards the end of the morning I went out and swung the axe to fill the carrying basket with firewood. Then I came back and cleaned the woodstove and vacced the hearth ready for the cosy fire later. Having written this, I realised that I was quite comfortable with nothing over my polo shirt. A watery sun had found its way through a gap in the clouds and when I checked the outside thermometer saw a reading of one degree – just two degrees warmer than it was before breakfast. BBC Weather is forecasting rises to 2 degrees tomorrow, 6 on Monday, 8m on Tuesday and 10 for the whole following week. Spring, which supposedly started yesterday, looks as if it is about to arrive!

After writing the last paragraph I went into the conservatory. The sun was less watery, and the temperature under the multi-layer roof was noticeably higher than that in the sitting-room. The sun itself was surprisingly high in the sky: it is amazing how its trajectory changes after midwinter.

I could see wet patches on the slabs outside, surrounding each chunk of compacted snow. I went out of the back door for a closer look and got dripped on by the icicles hanging from the guttering.

By dinnertime there was quite a lot of melt-water spreading across the slabs, but the wind was still fierce and the temperature was still barely above freezing. The forecasts are ambiguous, so we will see.

I cooked a very disappointing tail-fillet of wild salmon for dinner, and I'm afraid quite a lot ended up bagged and binned.

I was still loving my thick red socks...

### **Saturday 3 March 2018**

We had a fairly lazy start this morning, with Pat bringing two mugs of tea up to drink while we checked weather and news on our phones. The

outside temperature had still not crept above zero, so I wrapped up well to go out and chop firewood.

We were expecting Alistair to come over today and he confirmed with a text to say he had set out. There was some discussion about where Pat would like to go, and to my amazement he announced that he would prefer Retford to Welbeck because it has lots of charity shops! I wasn't quite sure whether this was for Pat's benefit or his - she loves browsing these, usually for long enough to drive me nuts as I can scan a typical shop and spot anything I might fancy in about five minutes.

So off they went. I cleaned the fire out, remembering this time to clean the inside of the door glass with wet kitchen roll dipped in mildly abrasive wood ash, polishing with a dry piece. I laid it with paper and kindling, ready for a nice glow later. Then I did a sock hunt, seeking more Anapurnas, and scoured quite a few cupboards and drawers until I found three pairs of knee-length socks in a drawer I use all the time.

I also prepared a 1kg gammon joint ready to roast in a bag for tonight's dinner.

With coffee and biscuits for Bailey and myself, I watched 1½ episodes of the new *Vikings* season I found on Amazon recently.

The gammon went down well with bubble-and-squeak and petits pois.

We managed to watch the whole of *Modus* without falling asleep.

### **Sunday 4 March 2018**

I put my boots on without the second pair of socks to go for the paper, which proved to be a mistake. The huge lump I now have on the outside of my right ankle - a result of the replacement collapsing - chafed badly with just a few minutes' walking and needed a plaster to protect it for the rest of the day.

Alistair went back up north to stay with a friend again after a delicious breakfast of scrambled eggs, leaving Pat and me to enjoy our Sunday. Pat made a couple of quiches, using up the leftover gammon and more of Millie's deliciously fresh eggs - one for Anton and one for us.

One of the my lower left molars had been aching over the past couple of days and became very painful during today. I tried washing the area with my generic chlorhexidine mouthwash, alternating this with TCP diluted 1:1. I also tried sucking Strepsils, and between these three attacks on the infection I kept the pain reasonably under control.

We noticed Bailey coughing quite a lot, and went to bed rather worried. Each bout of coughing ended in what looked as if it should have been vomiting, but didn't produce anything. I heard him making strange noises after getting into bed and got up a couple of times to have a listen at our bedroom door. He seemed to be settled, but this worry combined with the toothache made getting to sleep and staying that way difficult.

I received annual statements from HMRC and The Pension Service last week. The Income Tax one is particularly interesting as it breaks down how my year's tax totalling £3276 was spent by the Government. The biggest slice was welfare, to which I contributed £796 (cheerfully) and - a real poke in the eye for the Right and the Brexiters - the two smallest

were overseas aid at £36 and UK contributions to the EU at a mere £23. How could anyone get upset about that?

### **Monday 5 March 2018**

They also made waking up early this morning easy, and I felt unusually fresh when I got up at about 6:45. Bailey seemed fine, though he still coughed from time to time and the painful tooth stayed in the background until I had assaulted it with muesli.

Before that, though, Bailey and I had our first walk since the snow started early last week. It was clear and dry with the temperature up to a 'high' of two degrees. It was very quiet after we had made such an early start, and Bailey showed no signs of coughing while we were out.

Apart from a few small hard-frozen patches the going was dry and clear, allowing my HiTec walking shoes to grip really well. Incidentally, these were far more comfortable with my heavy-duty Anapurna socks rather than the thinner ones I have taken to wearing.

The dog did cough a little after we got back, but much less alarmingly than last night.

My tooth/gum became more and more painful during and after breakfast. I used mouthwash, TCP and Strepsils to try to control it.

Today was a full bed-changing Monday, and I did the whole job including moving out heavily-loaded bedside cabinets to allow me to vacuum thoroughly beside our beds as well as doing the rest of the floor and our mattresses. Then followed the usual wrestle with the fitted sheets, working up a good sweat before my shower.

Pat was worried that Anton might not have had any support last week because of the snow and decided to pay him a visit. She was gone before I got out of the shower, giving me another bite at *Vikings*.

Bailey had stopped coughing by lunchtime, so I hoped that he had got rid of whatever had been causing the bouts. I had got my troublesome tooth more comfortable by then, too. Pat made some leek and potato soup for dinner, in which I floated torn-off bits of garlic baguette to keep everything soft.

Even with this precaution the left side of my mouth was quite sore by bedtime. And, worryingly, the right side had begun to swell and ache when it woke me in the small hours. I used more mouthwash, but the pain got worse and I got little settled sleep.

### **Tuesday 6 March 2018**

It had eased a little by 7:15, when I got up, and tolerated the toothbrush fairly well. I sucked a Strepsil instead of my usual Ricola sugar-free elderflower sweet on the walk.

We did the usual route in 21¼ minutes, slower than yesterday partly because Bailey was quite generous with his poo (four stops – one bag) and partly because both my feet and legs felt weary. We met the woolly shepherd twice, too, which caused brief delays.

Eventually, when I managed to break through the dentist's automatic phone system, I managed to get an emergency appointment. I was

offered 3.30 this afternoon, but Pat has to make a second visit to Anton so his carer can explain how they help him to pay his bills at the Post Office. She tried to persuade me to take the appointment saying she could cancel hers, but I wouldn't take her up on that as the whole Anton fiasco has been wearing her out. So I now have a dental appointment for 11am on Thursday. I asked Pat to look at my gum and she could see a lump (abscess?) pushing out between the teeth, which I knew I could feel and even push from behind with my tongue but couldn't see in the mirror. So that wasn't my imagination. Bring out the Paracetamols – 47½ hours to go!

Our favourite biscuits (Biscoff from Lotus, which we have always known by their French or Belgian name of 'speculoos' because we could only get them in France for years) proved very manageable for me, because I could dunk them in my coffee to soften them without them falling apart, avoiding getting nasty abrasive crumbs digging into my various oral injuries.

Pat still wasn't back at 3:15pm. I hadn't bothered with lunch and had gone through a full cycle of my mouth feeling everything from really horrible to almost painless (the latter probably down to me rubbing Ibuprofen gel in through my beard). Once again, I had watched a couple of episodes of *Vikings*, the last of which covered the death of the Saxon king and the crowning of King Alfred.

She got back a little after 4pm with the usual tales of woe and I ended up registering a Co-op membership card for Anton, who had decided he wanted one because Andy, his main carer, has one. The good news is that we found a post office where he could pay his bills and do his meagre shopping, just across the road from the Sherwood pub where Andy takes him for lunch, as we do on birthdays and other special occasions. Thank you, Google!

We had Pat's pea-and-ham soup for dinner again to spare my tender teeth and settled down for another lazy evening. I had some mild tenderness on the right ankle which I treated with Ibuprofen gel and the teeth behaved fairly well until bedtime. I gave them a longer-than-usual wash with chlorhexidine mouthwash followed by another with TCP diluted one-to-four after brushing my teeth and the pain died down, allowing me to relax in bed.

### **Wednesday 7 March 2018**

I must have slept through until the bladder, the teeth or both woke me. I repeated the double mouthwash routine after my pee and must have gone off again quite quickly, because when I rolled over to check the time it was almost 8:30 – over an hour later than my normal waking time. Pat wanted a shower after yesterday's visit to Anton's as usual, so I decided to re-start the morning routine.

The walk was slightly complicated by lots of small children heading for school, but luckily there were none on bikes or scooters. My legs and feet felt rather sore and stiff, but we finished the route in a decent time of 20 minutes 28 seconds.



The window cleaners arrived while Pat was busy in the en-suite, driving Bailey to a very long and loud barking fit. It's not surprising that he gets a cough!

Before coffee I put all the empty glassware (mostly wine bottles) in the crates outside into two really big woven polypropylene shopping bags from the E LeClerc supermarket chain in France. They were available there years before our supermarkets caught on, and these two bags had been demoted from shopping to dumping glass because they really were showing their age. I put the bags in the car boot ready for tipping.

After coffee I went to Sainsbury's with a fairly short shopping list which took an awful long time to deal with, thanks to the shop's obsession with moving their stock around. I got most, but not all, of what we wanted but a few important bits got left out. On the way home I stopped at the recycling centre (formerly and affectionately known as 'the tip') to feed the glass into one of their huge steel skips, which have convenient knobs on the front to hang your bags on. When I got back we identified what I had failed to get and I went back out, just to the Co-op this time. One of Alistair's friends is wheat-intolerant and I was pleased to find that my favourite Co-op sausages are gluten-free, as were most of those at Sainsburys. I picked up two packets of gluten-free crackers to have with cheese tonight from the Co-op's surprisingly large 'FREE FROM' display, and a pack of Strepsils to try and control my mouth's obviously huge population of bugs.

I made a lunchtime pot of tea at about 1:30 and had a chunk of Camembert without accompaniment, followed by a small amount of Aldi milk chocolate, while Pat ate a packet of ready salted French Fries. I sucked a Strepsil to keep the bugs at bay!

After 'lunch' I noticed that the conservatory was receiving plenty of sunshine, so I went down the garden, wearing nothing over my polo shirt, with a carrier-bag and a poo bag, and at a guess, bagged and binned five or six pounds of Bailey poo.

The weather was quite pleasant, and I noticed that the pond pump was clogged. I deployed the new kneeler on the bridge and used the old washing-up brush I reserved for the purpose to clear the intake grills on the pump housing. I noticed our only surviving fish, a big silver carp (too big for the local heron) affectionately known as Big Daddy, lurking close by and was relieved to see that he had survived the cold snap.

The flow took off immediately, but the level was very low, so I turned on the outside tap, sending water down the hose and into the filter housing. At once the waterfall took off. A couple of hours would see the pond up to its normal level. By the time I had finished, the sunshine had gone, but it was still comfortable at just above 10 degrees, quite a bit higher than the BBC's forecast.

Pat did a sausage and vegetable bake on a very grand scale while I did a belated watering of the indoor plants, including the olive, lemon and orange trees, all of which must have been pretty thirsty. I was expecting to eat a can of tomato soup for dinner but actually managed the sausage bake quite well thanks to the improvement in my dental problems.

## **Thursday 8 March 2018**

I got up at 7:05 this morning after my fifth (or sixth?) visit to the loo. The legs had behaved in bed, as had the troublesome tooth, to my amazement. Typical: I have a dental appointment and my symptoms vanish after days of misery!

There was no sign of the forecast sleet, but there was quite a lot of water about. The temperature was around 5 degrees, with no wind, so Bailey and I took off on the usual walk, which was mostly uneventful, and got round in just over 20 minutes – uneventful because we met a woman with three little terriers and a big old Labrador on leads. The small dogs were up for a fight and their elderly companion obviously felt obliged to back them up! I managed to drag Bailey away in spite of the provocation.

I showered before my 11am dentist appointment and cleaned my teeth before going out. My immune system seemed to have been working hard on the infection and the teeth were not feeling bad at all. I met a new dentist, a very pleasant blonde lady who sounded Bulgarian (I only know this because of Aidan's partner Donka) and was called, I discovered from my appointment ticket, Teodora Filipova). I was given a prescription for Pennicillin and a follow-up appointment on the 20 March. I don't think she will be up for a drill-and-fill job on the tooth and will favour an extraction of one of my two last bottom molars – goodbye, chewing. I really don't want to wear a bottom denture...

Today has been fairly lazy so far. We had crackers and a variety of excellent cheeses for lunch. Various odd jobs needed doing, but we also got a good bit of reading in.

I did a fairly hard round of neck, shoulder and back exercises. I really must try to keep this up every day...

My dodgy mouth behaved fairly well this afternoon and evening. I managed one of my favourite biscuits – a Ringtons Triple Chocolate – with my afternoon cup of tea and we had reheated frozen chips and Heinz tomato soup for dinner.

The legs were quite stiff when I got up from my chair to get ready for bed.

## **Friday 9 March 2018**

After five pees with reasonable spells of sleep in between I got up at 7:05am feeling fairly refreshed. I had finally worked out my pennicillin régime: 7am, 3pm, 11pm and took a capsule when I got up. It looks as if this is going to be preventative rather than curative as the gums and teeth are feeling pretty good!

It was a bright, frosty morning with a temperature of about zero. I was a little anxious about the walk as I had a strange burning pain on the top of my right foot, as well as the familiar pain up the inside of my left thigh to the groin. It was the latter that caused me the most grief: by the time we got within sight of home I was suffering real pain. We got round in a reasonable 21 minutes 36 seconds with just one poo stop. I was much more comfortable pottering about in the kitchen, taking two Paracetamols, pouring and warming my tea and setting the table, and am even more comfortable sitting here at the desk. Yesterday's work-out seems to have done more harm than good, but I must try to keep up the routine.

I keep mentioning my workout but haven't explained how it goes, so I have just stolen a copy of the very old information from my website and pasted it onto a new page at the end of this diary. Once I had the typography sorted out I started bringing the descriptions up-to-date. I will try to persevere but this is going to be a long job, so please don't hesitate to try the exercises as they are currently described.

### **Monday 12 March 2018**

Nothing very notable happened over the weekend. Alistair had the boys here for Friday night and, as before, he and Pat took them to Laser Labyrinth on Saturday morning. Pat insisted on driving him and the lads back to Buxton late in the afternoon and the car did another of its peculiar acts on the way home. As before the engine wouldn't pull as well as it should and the power steering just stopped working altogether. When they had stopped and restarted both sets of symptoms went away and when I took the car for a test run on Sunday morning it drove quite normally.

The one notable thing was that I decided to buy a chicken and cook a proper Sunday dinner with roast potatoes, pointy cabbage, carrots and gravy. Despite our recent indifference towards food this went down really well with sponge cake and cream to follow. There were enough leftovers to feed us tonight too.

We completed this morning's walk without distress in 20 minutes 11 seconds.

The car got a more strenuous test this morning. I insisted on driving Pat to Anton's after the walk and my usual wrestle with our bedding (easier than usual because Pat had stripped the sheets and pillowcases).

Pat took a call on my mobile from the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme to rearrange my colonoscopy. She explained that I was driving and they agreed to ring tomorrow.

Anton had a fat wad of sixteen old ten-pound notes and three new slippery fivers which he wanted to use to pay his current bills, but he didn't understand that the old notes had to be paid into a bank account. We had a nightmare of a morning trying to deal with Anton's bills and covered quite a distance looking for banks and post offices where we could do the necessary stuff. Pat spent ages talking to someone at Lloyds bank (Anton has a Lloyds account) just off the Sheffield ring road at Manor Top but was no closer to finding a solution.

It seemed that the only plan was for Pat to pay the old tenners into her Barclays account and draw the money out in cash with which she could pay the bills. We went to a village where she was sure there was a Barclays branch, but like all other small village branches we remembered this had closed down.

That was where I came in. We decided to go home and I took over, doing some quick googling as soon as I got back to the PC. I discovered that I would be able to pay the old tenners into my Smile (Co-op) bank and draw the cash out draw so that Pat could pay the bills. Both operations could be done at any post office, including either of the two small ones in out village. We had a much-needed cup of tea and a biscuit while I was doing the research and drove straight to the post office which is part of a

useful general store, only five minutes from home. The young South Asian guy who was managing the shop knew exactly how to make all the necessary processes work and within minutes we had payment receipts for all Anton's bills...and no non-legal-tender old paper notes! Well done, the good old British GPO!

Job done, so we retired home and I sent Anton a fax to tell him (if he could understand it or his carer Andy saw it and could explain in the limited sign language he has to use now) that everything had been sorted. Then we settled down for a lazy few hours.

And the car had driven flawlessly all morning. It seems that to know who is the boss!

The leftovers from last night gave us another substantial dinner.

## **Tuesday 13 March 2018**

I got up at my usual time of 7:05 on a dull but dry morning with a temperature of eight degrees. Bailey was very eager for his walk, which was uneventful. My legs worked well and we finished in 20 minutes 18 seconds, seven seconds longer than yesterday with two poo stops.

I got the call from the Bowel Cancer Screening Service sometime after 10am and arranged to have my colonoscopy on Wednesday 25 April, booked at start at 10:45am. That will leave me with only one hospital appointment outstanding: ophthalmology in May. I assume I'll be called in around August for an ankle review, which should be very interesting...

After being frustrated in my attempts to buy various groceries from Tesco and the Co-op, I went to Tesco this morning. The main item I couldn't find anywhere else was Batchelors Quick-Soak Dried Peas but they had appeared on the Tesco website. It took me ages to hike around finding the other things I needed, and I needed an assistant to find the peas which were on a small shelf at floor level. I searched for ages for Pat's Oatibix and eventually found it on another very low shelf, but I couldn't find Tropicana Trop50 low-sugar juice. It definitely wasn't there, so I had to stop at Asda on the way home, where I found it with no trouble. I also wanted Herta Frankfurters which I hadn't found at Tesco, and Asda only had the chicken ones and another unheard-of brand's pork ones, so I bought both for a tasting.

What is happening to our supermarkets?

I decided to make a gluten-free Chocolate Nemesis – a dessert from the River Café cookbook which I made a lot shortly after meeting Pat, because her entire family fell in love with it – for dinner tomorrow night, because one of Alistair's friends who is wheat-intolerant will be joining us. Our local Co-op has a decent selection of 'free from' lines, but didn't have the necessary cooking chocolate. So I wheeled my empty trolley back out and went to Sainsbury's, who did have it.

The rest of the afternoon was spent making the dessert – a major undertaking in itself.

## **Wednesday 14 March 2018**

I got up at 7:15 and managed to have tea brewed and my ablutions completed before the 7:30 BBC news summary. It was a chilly but very

pleasant morning and we finished the habitual loop in 21 minutes, 50 seconds. This was quite a bit slower than Monday's and Tuesday's times, mostly because of Bailey's toilet stops.

I ordered a traditional Italian espresso coffee maker from Amazon for less than ten pounds yesterday and it arrived in time for coffee this morning. It is the old-fashioned aluminium kind which you heat on the gas hob. We tried it this morning with Lavazza Rosso coffee and once we had compensated for the very strong brew it was really successful. The coffee had no *crema* but tasted really good with frothed milk on top. I later ordered a gas-ring reducer which should focus the flames onto the bottom of the coffee maker.

I made a huge batch of mashed potato this morning to top the cottage pie Pat was doing for Alistair and his guest this evening. Cottage pie followed by Chocolate Nemesis – there's an incongruous combination!

Pat suddenly got the urge to re-hang all the pictures on the hall walls, so that was me busy for ages with ruler, pencil, hammer and nails.

Dinner was a great success following double gin-and-tonics with slices from one of the surviving lemons on our tree, which smelled wonderful. The Cottage Pie was served with baked beans (Branston, not Heinz). I had forgotten how utterly delicious Chocolate Nemesis was after all these years. Rich in chocolate and butter held together with eggs and topped with a light meringue-like crust it was truly wonderful. There was quite a lot left but I think I will make the other batch for next week anyway.

#### **Thursday 15 March 2018**

I stayed in bed for an extra 15 minutes to wait for the guests' toilet noises to subside, so I listened to the 8:30 news summary before taking over the bathroom. It was a dismal grey morning with moderate rain falling, but I decided to take Bailey out anyway. My ski-jacket kept the rain off, though the outer layer did get quite wet so I had to hang it on the bath taps. Bailey needed a thorough towelling-down before he could be allowed the freedom of the house.

I worked out how to make a 6-cup batch of espresso, divide it into two portions (mine to make coffee stronger than for Pat) and adjust each portion with whole milk, boost the temperature in the microwave and top with foamed milk. The results pleased both of us, despite the absence of *crema*.

We kept busy preparing the house for the arrival of our French 'daughter' and her friend tomorrow. We are both really looking forward to seeing her again.

I did a hefty Sainsbury's and Aldi shop in the mid-afternoon.

We finished the last bits of Cottage Pie for dinner, followed by small portions of Chocolate Nemesis (plenty left!).

The disaster of the day was the failure of the 1.2 metre fluorescent light in the utility room. I went to Wickes to buy a new tube but this behaved exactly like the old one (which I had smashed to fit it in the wheelie bin and had probably been fine!). I did a preliminary investigation of the wiring but couldn't make much sense of it as the daylight failed, so I

decided to leave the room with just the modest LED hanging torch which lives in the car and tackle the problem once the light returned.

### **Friday 16 March 2018**

Once I had woken up for a pee at around midnight, I couldn't get back to sleep for worrying. I don't know what else I was wittling about but I do know I spent hours rehearsing what I would try with the utility room light in the morning. I knew the the wiring was – to say the least! – eccentric, as the rest of the house's electrics were when we had to deal with problems. I knew the house had been rewired – or had additional circuits added – by the father of one of the owners who had come up with some pretty novel solutions. When Alistair fitted our new twin-bank consumer unit all sorts of oddities were revealed, some of which I – with my total lack of qualifications but considerable experience of designing and building hi-fi amplifiers and microcomputer interfaces – managed to diagnose and rectify.

I think I might have catnapped until around 4am but didn't think I had slept at all after that. I got up at 7am, feeling very weary and rather confused, and Bailey and I completed our walk in 19 minutes 41 seconds – our fastest for three weeks. My legs were stiff and sore, and the feet were aching a little, but I was very satisfied.

Straight after breakfast, with the LED torch deployed, I got down to dismounting the whole fluorescent fitting. I brought a small table lamp in to provide some more light and started out checking the wires in the wall switch in the kitchen hall and where the unit had been. I eventually identified which conductor was which and by mid-morning I had a pendant lampholder fitted to the power-supply cable and a 100-watt bulb lighting things up pretty well. This was a great relief after the night's worrying, and probably the most successful bit of DiY I have done for a long time. I will talk to Alistair, who is a trained electrician, about tidying things up when he gets back from camping weekend, and perhaps when *les demoiselles* have gone home.

When I had had coffee I went upstairs for a leisurely, soothing shower. It didn't do much for my aching arms and shoulders but made me feel a bit more human.

I ended up doing another round of Sainsbury's and Aldi this afternoon as Pat planned and began making the meals she wanted to give 'the girls'. I suspect they would prefer to be eating *à l'anglais* rather than checking out our imitations of French food, but Pat did want to be really hospitable. So there will be *croissants* (Aldi's superb posh ones) and *pains-au-chocolat* (untested) for breakfast tomorrow.

I started falling asleep in my chair – something I don't often do – and lost a big lump of time between 5 and 6pm. I don't know what woke me, but I still feel incredibly tired. At around 6 Pat got a message from Marie to say that they had left Oxford, were on the M40 and should be with us in about two hours. Having spent some time on the M40 over the years, trying to bypass the Birmingham conurbation, I thought that might be optimistic, particularly on a Friday night!

They arrived safely, and it was a real treat to have some lively young people in the house. They were really excited about their little holiday and

were positively bubbling. I enjoyed getting my French out of storage and Karine equally enjoyed using her excellent English.

### **Monday 19 March 2018**

The weekend passed pleasantly, though the heavy snow was a bit of a surprise. We took 'the girls' to our local pub for a long lazy lunch yesterday and today they went out to explore some of the more interesting places around where we live – mostly the Welbeck estate with its galleries, cafés and farm shop. I made another Chocolate Nemesis this afternoon and something went badly wrong. As I write I am waiting for it to cool and – I hope – set.

Bailey and I had a good walk in the icy cold this morning. The footing was dodgy but manageable if you were careful. We did the lap in 21¾ minutes.

### **Wednesday 21 March 2018**

I have got out of the rhythm of maintaining this diary. Yesterday was fairly complicated because I had a dental appointment at 11:20am. Pat had booked Bailey in for grooming at 12:30 and Karine and Marie wanted to go to the Original Factory Shop. All three were in or around the same village – the one just up the road from ours – and we managed to make everything happen.

Bailey and I had knocked 40 seconds off Monday's time for the walk, so I was feeling rather pleased.

We got everything happening on schedule and I had a very pleasant session with my new dentist Teodora Filipova (how many people can say that?). My infection had settled down completely, and she took x-rays of both sides. We discussed possibilities for long-term treatment, and in between I asked her if I was right in thinking she was from Bulgaria. I was, so this really broke the ice and we ended up discussing the insanity of Brexit.

We got everything happening on schedule and in the afternoon Pat took the girls to Welbeck to visit the farm shop and the gallery while I stayed home to help Bailey recover from his busy morning at the groomer's. Halfway through the afternoon I had a sudden brainwave. The car was reaching working temperature in an abnormally short time and the heater had suddenly stopped working. Somehow I pieced this together and decided to check the coolant level. I couldn't see any fluid in the reservoir at all, so I went back to the same village for about the third time and brought back a two-litre bottle of the recommended stuff. This disappeared almost completely down the pipe but the temperature rose more slowly and the heater started working again! I went back up the road yet again and bought a four-litre bottle which the engine half-emptied before the level reached MAX. I couldn't see any sign of leakage, so I ended the afternoon feeling pretty pleased with myself.

When I ran the car engine, the temperature gauge didn't rise much beyond 60 degrees but the heater worked. And when I lifted the bonnet after a brief trip to Aldi and Asda the coolant level was more-or-less where it was after I filled up. Phew! It has been a very long time since I did any DiY car maintenance, and it's good to have a little success.

Alistair appeared after a fairly long absence as he had to get a blood pressure monitor fitted at the surgery.

We set off in two cars at about 6pm to get dinner at Whitby's, the 'Cathedral of Fish and Chips' between Rotherham and Sheffield. The main courses were wonderful but the sherry trifles and coffees were a little disappointing. Karine and Marie really enjoyed the food, as did Aidan, which had joined us from home.

### **Thursday 22 March 2018**

This morning was beautiful and much milder at around 10 degrees, though with a chilly breeze. We were a minute and 20 seconds slower than yesterday, thanks to three poos and some protests from my left leg and foot.

After another medical appointment, Alistair left to look at a car because his little Citroën C2 was giving trouble and then to stay with a friend, though he will be back with Ewan and Tom tomorrow. They will brighten things up.

That will be good because Karine and Marie, whom I had given a knock on my way out for the walk, after spending quite a while squeezing their luggage and souvenirs into their even littler Citroën C1, eventually set off at between 10 and 11am, heading for the South Coast, aiming to visit Rye and Brighton before spending the night in an AirBnB room in Portsmouth where they will get the ferry home. We will miss them badly, but the boys will provide plenty of light relief.

We had a fairly lazy end to the morning after they had gone, mostly catching up with the news on TV and drinking coffee made with the new espresso device. I have got the knack of using it now, tailoring two cups to Pat's and my tastes. I am not getting any of the lovely golden *crema* I expect from the coffee maker, which is a little disappointing. Maybe I am not packing the grounds in tightly enough.

Bailey seemed to have adjusted to everyone leaving after being rather gloomy.

We had a modest lunch of cheese, pâté and crackers. We were both pretty tired by the time everything had settled down, and neither of us could be bothered to eat anything significant at dinner time. I did cook a gammon joint which had reached its 'use by' date in a roasting bag with an onion and some garlic. It was cold by bedtime and went in the fridge.

We had watched hardly any TV while the gang were here, so we had some serious catching-up to do through the evening. Fatigue caught up, though, and we went to bed quite early after several *WhatsApp* messages from Karine to say that the day had gone really well and their room in Portsmouth looked good. Pat was looking particularly worn and will need her energy for the boys tomorrow evening.

### **Friday 23 March 2018**

In spite of four pees I felt I had slept quite well this morning. I really enjoyed a long, painless relaxation session, though, hugging my wonderful pure-down pillows while lying face-down. I could happily have



stayed there for another hour, but got up on the dot of 7:05am, keeping up my discipline.

It was really strange coming down to a house without sleeping-in visitors, but we will have Alistair back with the boys for tonight and again during the week. He also hopes to have collected a new car.

My legs and feet were reasonably comfortable when I was up and handled the walk fairly well. We finished, with one poo, in 21 minutes 23 seconds, third fastest - and slowest - for the week.

I had a look at the Hi-Tec walking shoes and realised that I had put Scholl gel insoles in on top of the hard ones included with the shoes. I decided to try without the Scholls for a quick visit to the Co-op, but was not particularly comfortable. I will try the Scholls without the original ones next time. I bought various pizza and similar for tonight, although the boys will probably be wanting popcorn chicken from our takeaway pizzeria tonight. Apparently this is a KFC invention, for which I looked up details. It sounds quite good.

Alistair came back in the early afternoon in a very tidy-looking black Peugeot 407 estate (with a panoramic glass room!) and after getting his phone and music sorted out took Pat off to Buxton to pick the boys up. I watched a movie and then set the kitchen table for dinner, leaving three pizzas in the kitchen freezer ready to augment to takeaways.

While waiting I took a few minutes to check our engine's coolant level, and was disappointed to find that it had dropped almost to the bottom of the translucent reservoir. If it has been leaking away rather than disappearing somewhere in the engine system it must have been while I was driving because there were no traces of spillage on the driveway. I will top up again tomorrow...

### **Monday 26 March 2018**

I did top up the coolant early on Saturday. It took something over a litre. I will need to check again after Monday's trip to Anton's.

The weekend went well, with Alistair collecting the boys on Friday evening and, with Pat, taking them to laser Labyrinth again. Apart from Tom climbing the apple tree and scaring himself by hanging by his hands and being unable to find anywhere to put his feet (it works OK on our spiral staircase!) and having to be rescued by his adoring Granny) the rest of their stay went well. Pat went to Buxton with Alistair and the boys on Saturday evening to help avoid stress between him and Julie.

We had Saturday night and all of Sunday to ourselves. The high spot (apart from the disappointing Australian Grand Prix) was taking advantage of the warm and sunny weather to take the orange, lemon and olive trees out of the conservatory and spray them copiously with a dilute solution of Fairy Liquid in the hope first of drowning the aphids (we think) which have covered the leaves with sticky honeydew and second making it vulnerable to a good hosing today. They then had to be got back in before the evening got too chilly. All this was a major weightlifting task as all the pots are heavy and the olive is very heavy.

This morning's walk, in mild air and glorious sunshine, was quite painful, with my left lower back seeing to generate sciatic nerve pain and both feet

sore as well. We got round in a slightly slow 22 minutes. The computers had taken charge of the transition to British Summer (Standard?) Time so I only needed to change the clocks on the cooker and microwave, which I had forgotten yesterday.

Pat insisted on driving to Anton's alone despite her anxiety about the power steering and I did my usual epic with the bedding and the vacuum cleaner before taking a break for coffee and getting the three fruit trees back out onto the patio. The hose has been used to top up the pond several times, so I recovered the end from the bottom of the garden and fitted a spray. I gave the trees a very thorough drenching with a fine but fairly fierce spray, and when the sun had dried the leaves the honeydew seemed to have disappeared. I would have to wait for them to dry completely before bring the trees back in. Meanwhile, at about 11:30, I inspected them and there was no stickiness on the dry areas of the leaves, which were a bit limited because, in spite of the unbroken sunshine through the morning, the temperature was only 11 degrees and the breeze felt quite chilly.

Alistair and I heaved the heavy pots back into the conservatory. I was really pleased to find the leaves dry with no sticky patches, as was Pat when she got in after a really trying morning with Anton.

She had already alerted me with a text message saying that the ATM at Anton's nearest post office had refused his debit card, so he had been unable to pay any of his bills. Once she got back, we worked together to try to figure out what might have gone wrong. She had brought back bank statements from his Lloyds and Post Office accounts (set up by his last social worker but with none of the direct debits promised by his old social worker. We ended up having a long three-way conversation with his new social worker, who promised to try and make sense of things. We won't be holding out breath. Pat spoke to Rachael, Anton's care-service manager, who promised to get tomorrow's support worker to take Anton to the bank and try to sort the card problem out. I checked his account details and there seems to be no reason why his bills can't all be set up on direct debit.

Alistair brought the boys down in time for a dinner of home-made sausage pie (I can't remember where we got the sausage meat at Christmas but it was really good) with gravy plus chips and mushy peas from our local chippy. This went down well with everyone.

My feet had both felt rather battered from the morning's walk and the left one had been made much worse by an accidental wrench. I decided before bed that I might cancel tomorrow's walk, a decision reinforced by the forecast of heavy rain. I gave the foot a generous basting with Ibuprofen gel and managed to get comfortable in bed.

## **Tuesday 27 March 2018**

When I got up for a pee shortly after dawn, having had a really good sleep, I saw that the window was covered with rain, which removed my doubts I might have had about skipping the walk, although the foot felt much better. This pain really is weird and totally unpredictable.

I added the 20-minutes walking to my usual getting-up time and got downstairs at about 7:30am.

When I went into the bathroom I noticed that the mat had been left down after the boys' bath. I picked it up to hang it over the side of the bath and saw the biggest house spider I had ever seeing clinging to the underside. If I had though I would have taked the mat outside and liberated the beast, but I reacted spontaneously and dropped it down the loo. I felt rather bad about this after flushing the poor creature away.

Halfway through my first cup of tea I was joined in the kitchen by 6-year-old Tom. We had a very enjoyable conversation, full of strange questions and rapidly-improvised answers. At around 8 Alistair came in and the morning took off.

I found a trailer for the new Peter Rabbit movie, but the link from the PC to my mother's old Sony stereo was still not working. I spent some time tracking cables and ensuring that loudspeaker plugs were firmly in their correct sockets. I also fiddled with the rather primitive digital system and got some sound, though I thought only one speaker might be working. I listened to the awesome John Williams playing the incredible *Asturias* before announcing that the film's trailer was ready. Ewan and I thought it was too modern, with too much silliness from modern TV comics, though some of the slapstick was quite good, but Tom quite enjoyed it. No decision was made at that point, and later it was decided not to bother. We watched several *Achmed the Dead Terrorist* on YouTube instead. After a run up to the Co-op for milk, burgers and brioche buns we were all set for dinner.

#### **Thursday 29 March 2018**

Yesterday morning Bailey and I did the usual walk in 21 minutes 29 seconds. After lunch Alistair and Pat took the boys for a swimming session at Bakewell, but unfortunately the person Pat had spoken to on the phone, who she thought had said the session started at 4:30pm, was mistaken, because it had *finished* at 4:30. Nevertheless they managed to get the boys home happy. Alistair loaded most of the rest of his tools and left later.

This morning I decided I *must* do another walk, having missed Tuesday's, and we did an amazing time of 20 minutes 52 seconds, the fastest since last Wednesday. I paid for the time, though, because both legs and feet remained quite painful after breakfast. I set out to shop at M&S and Sainsbury's once we had decided what we wanted to eat over the Easter holiday. This was difficult because Pat was feeling pretty down, having been trying to renew her expired passport for a few days and had discovered that her birth certificate had vanished. The Scottish registry website (she was born in Lossiemouth) was down, supposedly for maintenance, and the phone wasn't being answered except by an insane recorded message. When I got back she told me she had found a different site which also handled renewals, and had managed to get her request processed, though at an outrageous cost. She actually managed to be really pleased at all the goodies I had bought.

I had decided to try my Reebok trainers for the shopping trip, which turned out to be a really bad idea. My legs and feet were pretty uncomfortable throughout the shopping, and by the time I got home and unloaded the car I was in severe pain. I took two Paracetamols with a Naproxen and things had improved by about 3:30pm. I stuck to

stockinged feet rather than allowing shoes to aggravate my poor extremities even more, and I think I may have to pension the Reeboks off for some days and stick to the softer HiTec walking shoes, although their comfort is far from perfect.

The shopping was a success, though, with some really nice goodies from Markies, including a Key Lime Pie – something I have always been curious about. I also got a French-style lemon tart, just in case. Tomorrow (Good Friday) night we will be doing Sonia Stevenson's classic fish pie which we used to serve to our catering customers back in the old Derby Days. I got a nice-looking knuckle-end of leg of lamb for Easter Day, and two twin-packs of Coquilles St-Jacques to serve as starters. I can't remember what we planned for Saturday and Monday, though the latter should be cold lamb!

I took the Co-op gammon joint which I cooked in a roasting bag a few days ago out of the fridge this afternoon and cut a few slices off. The meat was mild and really nice. We will be having that with the last batch of pea soup, which I started defrosting in the microwave earlier, for tonight's dinner.

After a lovely sunny morning, rain set in after lunch, and the forecast is for a mostly wet Easter, with even sleet predicted on Monday morning – perfect for a Bank Holiday!

### **Friday 30 March 2018**

I decided to do a walk today, in spite of the confusing status of Good Friday (a holiday but not a Bank Holiday?), but I awarded myself a 60-minute lie-in on the basis that there would be no children going to school. We got off after the 8 o'clock news and didn't see a soul, human, canine or feline, finishing in 21 minutes 56 seconds, quicker than Monday but slower than Wednesday and Thursday. There was a damp rawness in the air of a dull morning, starting off what is forecast to be a cold, wet Easter.

The legs and feet felt quite good.

The fish pie was nowhere near as good as I remember it. I messed with Sonia Stevenson's recipe and didn't do the fish justice. The Key Lime Pie was very nice, but I think the French lemon tart will be better on Sunday.

I'm very aware that I am getting lazy with the diary. I will try to keep up my entries, but almost 550 pages make quite an epic!

### **Sunday 1 April 2018**

I took a tray of tea back to bed after my ablutions this morning, as Pat was sleeping very heavily. In the end she didn't touch her cup.

Because it was Easter Sunday we didn't walk today, but the top of my left foot was appallingly painful when I went up the road to get the paper and Anton's milk. It settled down with a rub of Ibuprofen gel, allowing me to do odds and ends.

We had some bake-at-home *pains aux raisins* (from M&S and very authentic indeed – we will buy these again) for breakfast and exchanged Easter cards and gifts. Pat had got me some really top-end marzipan chocolates from somewhere like Austria or Switzerland and a Green & Black's milk chocolate egg (their milk chocolate is still amazing!). I had

bought her a lovely basket of growing spring flower plants (M&S again) and the latest novel by one of her favourite chick-lit authors.

My odds and ends finished with giving the car a bit of attention. I gave the tyres the benefit of my digital compressor, which I don't do anywhere near as often as I should. The coolant level had dropped to just a millimetre above the bottom of the reservoir, so I tipped the remains of the 5-litre bottle into a well-washed 4-pint milk bottle so it will be available if the system stops working. I wedged the bottle upright in the box I keep in the boot to stop small items banging about.

The foot put up with all this and stayed quite comfortable for the rest of the day.

After my disappointment with the fish pie, I persuaded Pat to do our Easter Sunday dinner of leg-of-lamb, which she roasted beautifully and served with gravy, new potatoes, carrots, leeks and Béchamel sauce – a really delicious meal to compensate for my mess-up! I drank a glass of an amazing Catalan red wine called Cabalié which I discovered by accident and which we found again in the *Sunday Times* Wine Club magazine. We had the M&S lemon tart, which was distinctly better than the Key Lime Pie, for dessert. I am really looking forward to the *cold* lamb version of the meal this evening.

I had a phone-call from my daughter Sarah this afternoon. She and her husband Dave are busy doing up the house they bought recently, which sounds like a pretty huge undertaking, but she wanted to know all the family news, so we had quite a long talk, which was a real treat. Then I passed her over to Pat for the *rest* of the news!

### **Monday 2 April 2018**

I awarded myself a bank holiday lie-in this morning, expecting a nasty sleety day, and was amazed when I got up at 7:30 for a pee to see snow falling quite heavily and settling.

We had to make a decision, because Pat was sure there would be nothing in Anton's fridge. We decided there was not alternative to trying to get to him at least.

When I went out to scrape the snow off the car I discovered that it was raining! This was a different sort of sleet – fairly heavy snow and then light rain!

There was a lot of lying water on the roads, as well as the slushy remains of the snow, but we got through to Anton's estate. We had to walk the last 100 metres or so, but the footing wasn't bad. We kept the visit short, having delivered two bottles of milk and some boxes of our left-overs (including the fish pie, which I hope he enjoyed!). The drive home was still slushy and wet but there were no real problems.

The rest of the day was lazy, as befits a bank holiday. The cold lamb meal was good, although the meat was a bit chewy, and the second serving of lemon tart went down well.

I'll be back to the old routine tomorrow, starting with getting up just after 7am and out for a walk with Bailey and going on to a wrestle with the bedding!

## **Tuesday 3 April 2018**

I allowed myself a half-hour lie-in, and Bailey and I managed an uneventful walk this morning.

Pat had arranged to visit Barney today, and we were relieved to see that the weather was much better and all the snow and slush had gone, though there was still a huge amount of lying water on the roads.

We invited Barney and his Mum to have lunch and headed out to the pub in High Bradfield where we had gone once before. Apart from the fact that Barney and I had French fries instead of the wonderful three-times-fried we had had before, the meal was really enjoyable. We got through all sorts of news and reminiscences over the meal and dropped our guests off at home quite late in the afternoon.

Then the adventure began. The complicated road system on the way back through Hillsborough was appallingly congested and at a total standstill. I had got us into the wrong lane, which would take us back to where we started from, but I was able to take a road that runs parallel with Barney's. This took us a very long way round, but at least we kept moving at sensible speeds and got back into Sheffield at a point where the traffic was flowing well. We joined our route home and made reasonable progress back to the M1.

## **Wednesday 4 April 2018**

I was reluctant to get up this morning but managed to get downstairs to hear the 7:30am news summary before doing my ablutions. By the time Bailey and I were ready for our walk it was raining quite heavily, but we managed it and only needed a good towel-down each before getting ready for breakfast.

I had a short shopping list for a visit to Sainsbury's which I managed before coffee time.

We needed a new bulb for the big table lamp that lives on our sittingroom window-sill, and I was delighted to find a Philips LED bulb staring me in the face in Sainsbury's – 8.5 watts to give the light of a 60-watt incandescent bulb!

A little later I did a bit of torch-maintenance and battery shopping. The little LED torch I have been using when logging my nocturnal visits to the loo needed new batteries (three AAA's), which I managed to find in my big battery box. Once this was done I decided to bin all the rechargeable batteries and chargers I have accumulated over the years. I ordered fairly large job-lots of Duracell Industrial AAA and AA batteries to replenish my stocks.

I have a big Maglite torch which Pat gave me for Christmas a few years ago. It takes three D-cells – the big fat ones which I think we used to call U2's. She has been asking me why I had bought two little LED torches when I had the big one. Fair question, so it occurred to me to search the Web for an LED upgrade, which I found on Amazon and ordered straight away.

We demolished a can of mackerel fillets in oil between us, after I had drained off the vegetable oil, mashed the fish, seasoned it and stirred in a

little extra-virgin olive oil. The resulting sandwiches, on Hovis wholemeal with Lurpak slightly-salted butter, were really delicious.

Pat decided to wash the kitchen floor so I volunteered to go round with the little Vax cleaner. After that I got to the last item on my internal job list for the day.

My amazing Casio watch, with its titanium and resin case and solid-titanium bracelet, had got itself a little muddled. I had got it picking up the atomic clock radio signal at just after 1am every morning from the bedroom window-sill, but the analogue time shown by the hands didn't match the correct digital time. I dug out the little fat multi-lingual instruction book and battled through the tiny text, finally managing to synchronise the digital and analogue times as perfectly as I could judge. I know it is rather childish, but I love ultra-precise digital toys and there isn't much point – or pleasure – in having a watch which should be accurate to a microsecond or less but isn't even accurate to a few minutes! I am particularly fond of watching my watch's second hand hitting 12 just as the Greenwich time signal's final 'pip' sounded or Big Ben's first bong was struck. Inevitably, therefore, the incorrect analogue time had been irritating me quite badly.

I had BBC Radio 4 FM on towards 6pm. Unlike the DAB system, this is analogue and Big Ben's chimes (synthetic or real) are precisely accurate. I watched the second hand of my watch in the run-up to 6pm and the second hand hit 12 at the same time as the first bong sounded. Back in business!

A large portion of Pat's wonderful scrambled eggs (made with Millie's hens' eggs) with almost a whole pack of delicious M&S smoked salmon lweft me feeling very well nourished for the evening.

### **Thursday 5 April 2018**

I had quite a restful night, having started a simplified programme of logging my nocturnal pees. I no longer record the time of each, merely entering a tick for each.

I woke ready to get up at 7:05am. The sun was shining brightly and the morning looked very inviting. I discovered that a brisk and quite chilly westerly wind was blowing when Bailey and I set out for our usual walk. We met the long-haired Shepherd, who has been missing for some weeks and whose mistress had a little girl in tow, and the two friends got on very well as usual.

Alistair was bringing the boys over for a couple of days so we compiled a shopping list of things they would enjoy and I made a quick visit to the Co-op, getting home shortly before they arrived. Both boys were a little under the weather and were quite happy to settle down with CBBC on TV.

By mid-afternoon half the floor of the sitting-room was covered in all the stuff that Pat collected in her 'making it' box and both boys (plus Pat and a little later Alistair) were thoroughly engaged. I had done some troubleshooting with the Sony mini-stereo I bought for my late mother many years ago, which I use for sound output from the PC. It had gone 'mono' with only the left speaker delivering. I moved the right speaker to

the end of the windowsill to give a wider sound-stage so that I could hear both channels and after a little cable-jiggling I had full, rich stereo again.

I was having a short practice session on my guitar when Ewan joined me, and we started talking about music, particularly folk blues. I found the *Angola Prisoners' Blues* folder and Ewan expressed curiosity about Robert Pete Williams's *Electric Chair Blues*. I explained with the minimum of detail about capital punishment. He then demonstrated a rather silly free game on his tablet.

Later I emptied the car's glove compartment. We had a rattle while driving which Pat was convinced was something bad happening, and when I suggested the glovebox she assured me there was nothing in it to explain the noise. Actually there was quite a bit of stuff, including a USB charger to plug into the cigar lighter socket. This would roll around nicely among the sweet boxes and other bits. We will see.

After that I went down the garden to clear the intake grilles of the pond pump, which had stopped sending water to the little waterfall fed from the filter. I used the garden kneeler which I bought recently to get down to the job and discovered that our one-and-only fish, a big old silver carp known as Big Daddy, was hanging stationary above the pump. I touched him and he didn't react, so I guessed that he was still in partial hibernation because of the cold weather. I gave him a gentle push, the first time I had ever touched him, and when he drifted clear I was able to lift the pump out of the water and use an old washing-up brush to get the duckweed and other garbage out of the pump's slots. The falls were soon falling again. I also netted as much floating duckweed as I could.

We conducted an interesting culinary experiment at dinner time. We have been finding beef mince difficult to cook to a nice tender result recently, though we have discovered that mince with a decent fat content is better than reduced-fat mince. Pat had some mince and onions for Alistair's favourite pie left over in the freezer, but not enough for a decent-sized piece to feed three adults and two growing boys so we decided to try making a 50/50 blend with Quorn, which is made from some kind of fungus culture. The result was very acceptable, so next time we'll try the Quorn mince without beef.

At bedtime I had a horrible bout of coughing. My chest and throat felt dry but I sensed that something needed coughing up. A few times, I went into an uncontrollable coughing fit which firmly would not stop. As usual I put a generous blob of Boots Vapour Rub in each nostril so that I was inhaling menthol vapour with every breath, and eventually things settled down, leaving me feeling quite exhausted.

### **Friday 6 April 2018**

I felt weary when I woke this morning but managed to get myself up at 7:30. The morning was bright and hazy, with a blurred sun shining and a fairly gentle but chilly wind. Bailey and I did our usual walk, and I felt the time was at least average although I forgot to start the stopwatch.

I decided I was well overdue for a hair and beard trim and managed to get to our local barber shop by about 11am. As the weather is warming (a bit) I went for the full crop: clipper-number two on the top and one on the back, sides and beard.



Today's plan was for Alistair to take the boys swimming before their appointment for a dental checkup in Bamford, deep in the Peak. However, the boys were in a seriously unco-operative mood and were not ready in time for a swim. Pat went off to the dentist with them after an early lunch of bacon, egg and mushroom sandwiches, leaving me to clear the dishes and pass the time by myself. I did this by watching a rather mediocre American thriller which I had recorded a few weeks ago, in between fitting an LED bulb, which had arrived from Amazon in the mid-morning, to my huge 3-cell Maglite torch. This produced a really powerful cold-white beam and should be far less of a drain on the batteries. I also took delivery of a pair of 'lichen'-coloured (a sort of pale khaki) lightweight Regatta trousers to match the dark grey ones I have been wearing as 'best' for several months.

Finally I tracked down the Brabantia website and ordered a replacement for the little plastic tag that attaches the lid to the pedal in our 30-litre kitchen bin. Pat had managed to dislodge the old tag with a bit of over-zealous cleaning and, although I had managed to reinstall it (no mean trick, believe me!), it didn't look as if it would stay in its slots for very long.

### **Monday 9 April 2018**

Saturday on a 'boys here' weekend followed the usual plan, with Alistair and Pat taking them to Laser Labyrinth and then back for takeaways. On Sunday he took them home and went on to his friends' place. He will have the boys next weekend, so the plan will be similar if not identical, and then he won't have them for two consecutive weekends, which he will presumably spend with friends again.

Yesterday we had an ordinary Sunday morning and then went to Aidan's for a late-afternoon Sunday dinner. On the way, we stopped for Pat to visit the Co-op, and when I tried to drive off something seriously agonising happened among the bones of my left (clutch) foot. The pain was excruciating, and for a moment it looked as if we would need to change seats. However, after a few experiments with foot-position on the clutch pedal the pain faded to some extent, and I was able to make it across to Rotherham and reserve into Aidan's driveway.

Dinner was good (Donka *is* a chef, after all!), with pork fillet and lovely vegetables washed down with a nice white Burgundy and my contribution of a very classy Spanish red from my birthday and Valentine's gifts. Then Aidan insisted on me sampling some Maker's Mark Bourbon, about which I had read – probably in a Harry Bosch novel. It was by far the best US whisky I had ever tasted and I may decide to add a bottle to my 'specials' collection. I wasn't drunk when we got up, but there was no question of me driving. Fortunately Pat had only drunk juice, so she had no problems getting us home.

Before leaving we were treated to an impressive drumming demo by Aidan. He really is good, and his grandfather – a drummer himself – would be very proud of him.

It must have been the booze, but I had a strange night when I seemed to be awake most of the time, but was relaxed and comfortable anyway. I

got up at 7:15am and did the usual walk with Bailey on feet that felt remarkably comfortable, finishing in just 22 minutes.

This morning, after Pat had gone off to Anton's, I discovered that without warning the buttons on our Humax Foxsat satellite box's remote had stopped working. I replaced its two AAA batteries with newly-bought Duracell Industrial ones, but I still couldn't switch the box on. The dysfunctional buttons included the power one, but with the aid of my newly LED-powered Maglite I found the button on the Humax itself. Once it was on I could use some, but not all, of the box's functions, so an urgent search on Amazon followed. I found a remote on Prime and had it ordered by mid-morning. It should be here tomorrow.

Pat had a horrible morning with Anton, who seems to be resenting what she does more and more and to blame her for everything. It is almost impossible to get him to understand anything about what is going on around him. He wants his support worker, Andy, to do the bill-paying bit with him rather than Pat. She was actually in tears a few times when she got back this morning.

We had a panic when she couldn't find the card which lives on the office noticeboard with cues to all her login credentials. After blaming me (and I had completely emptied the blue recycling wheelie-bin!) she found it somewhere improbable. She made a new copy and pinned it back on the board but I sneakily scanned it and stored a JPEG on the PC.

Some really enjoyable gymnastics for both men and women made this afternoon tremendously entertaining. Our young gymnasts really are brilliant!

Fish fingers and leftover mushy peas for dinner tonight...

## **Tuesday 10 April 2018**

I got up rather reluctantly at 7:15, fully intending to go for a walk. Judging from the amount of standing water on our paving, it had obviously been raining quite heavily earlier, and this started again shortly before walking time. Bailey went out without much enthusiasm and needed a good towel-down when he came back. I decided that we could walk quite well in the mid-morning if, as forecast, the rain stopped later.

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and at 12:30pm, after a short shopping trip in a nasty cold drizzle, getting vegetables for a main-course soup – a problem because neither the village Co-op nor the One-Stop Shop had any leeks – and replenishing my stock of cough-and-cold remedies, needed as I have felt pretty rough for the past few days with swimmy sinuses and scary uncontrolled coughing fits around bedtime. I got Sudafed (the expensive version of Sainsburys' extra-strength decongestants), Benylin expectorant cough mixture and Jakeman's excellent cough sweets, which I only met when we moved up here. I also picked up two packets of the Co-op's rather good *demi-baguettes* to go with the soups Pat was making.

After two coffees, I still didn't feel very enthusiastic about going for a walk. Sorry, Bailey!

After phoning Pat to say I might be gone some time searching for leeks, I had a repetition of the intense pain in my left foot which I had

experienced when declutching on the way to Aidan's on Sunday. A few repeated presses on the clutch eased it and I got home with all the required foodstuffs.

Just before 3pm I took delivery of the new remote for the Humax FoxSat satellite box and eight CR2032 lithium batteries for Pat's LED reading light, the life-saver when her insomnia is really bad. Amazon's packing was ridiculous: the remote was in a Jiffy bag inside one of the cardboard wrappers they use for books and the four little cards of batteries were in a fairly large cardboard box with a big warning about Lithium batteries.

The new remote was obviously a genuine Humax one and worked beautifully, demonstrating that the keypad on the original one must just have been knackered due to endless use, day after day and night after night. £19 was a reasonable price for restored user-friendliness!

Pat had made two huge pans of healthy soups: one of *pistou*, a French vegetable soup whose name was close to that of the classic Italian pasta sauce *pesto*, and a classic British leek and potato. We went for the *pistou* for dinner, with crisp French bread and, in my case, a modest glass of Toro Loco red.

### **Wednesday 11 April 2018**

I had a decent night apart from the five visits to the loo, but I WAS quite depressed when the time to get up approached. I felt very tired, even after a good sleep, and my mind was wandering. The prospect of my forthcoming colonoscopy revealing bowel cancer was niggling away, and I wasn't sure whether that was a bad idea or not. What with failing vision and collapsing feet, the future was looking increasingly grim. I have had this sort of stuff going through my head on quite a few mornings. I have been lucky with my health, but everything is becoming very hard work now.

I got up at 7:15 on a dull, dank morning with the temperature at about 7 degrees and my legs and feet feeling fairly good. Bailey was very excited at the prospect of a walk and we did the circuit in 21¼ minutes without too much pain on my part. I emptied the dishwasher and set up for breakfast when we got back, and here I am back at the keyboard.

Later in the morning I was literally reduced to tears by a 100-metre race at the Commonwealth Games. I love the way the Para events have been slotted in among all the others but this one caught me unawares. Some of the runners quite obviously had cerebral palsy, but in others the impairment was barely perceptible. The little girl who finished last was by far the most obviously disabled but she was clearly thrilled to finish and had hugs for all the others. I was reminded of the time when colleagues and I from the Curnow School in Redruth took the Cornwall team to inter-county special schools athletics championships at Bulford army camp in Somerset. We won, and on the way home in the minibus we sang 'We are the champions' over and over again. One of my boys preferred 'we are the tambourines', because we used to do a lot of percussion work: he knew what a tambourine was but had never heard of champions! Today's result was just too much for me and I had a good weep. Nostalgia is a wonderful thing!

Nothing much happened for the rest of the day. I decided to shut the wood-burner down for the 'summer'. And spent half an hour or so cleaning the door glass, clearing the remaining ashes and vaccing the fireplace, before taking the log baskets and fire-irons down the garden to the summer-house.

Later, we had delicious cheese, mushroom and onion omelettes made with Millie's gorgeous fresh eggs.

### **Thursday 12 April 2018**

I think I slept well until around 5am, after which I was up and down to the loo but relaxing in between. In spite of this upper-respiratory-tract bug my nasal passages were perfectly clear and I was breathing slowly, smoothly and silently, in through the nose and out through the mouth. I had taken max-strength Sudafed capsules before bed, so these probably helped. All my bones and muscles were pain-free, too – even the feet, so whatever position I adopted was really relaxing and comfortable.

I got up at 7:10am to a dank, dull morning with a temperature of 6 degrees. The paving outside was wet from recent rain but none was falling. We got out for the walk straight after the 7:30 news bulletin on Radio 4 and I was unusually comfortable walking. The pace I was managing felt strong and regular and it was only as we were approaching home that my legs and feet began to protest mildly. Definitely the most enjoyable walk for quite a while.

When I had spent half an hour on the computer I realised that I was sweating profusely and feeling quite rough, with a sinus headache and very itchy eyes. I felt a little better after breakfast and was planning a short shopping trip when Pat reminded me that she 'needed' to go to Retford. She had complained of feeling dodgy as well but refused my offer to drive her. The shopping would have to wait.

I felt much better after two strong coffees and would have been quite happy to go to the shops, but at 11:30 Pat still wasn't back from Retford. While she was out I discovered how to block email senders and divert their messages to my junk folder automatically. Dealing with the backlog in my deleted items folder was tedious, but once that was done blocking new senders shouldn't be terribly demanding. The new version of *Outlook* doesn't seem to block emails from senders whose messages I delete unread, as the older version did.

I did go shopping after lunch (which was a hastily improvised but very enjoyable Greek salad of cucumber, tomatoes, Kalamata olives and crumbled Feta cheese, dressed with lemon juice and olive oil) and got everything on our relatively brief list from Sainsbury's and Aldi. As usual, we remembered some things we should have bought, such as sausage roll ingredients for Aidan's birthday party next weekend. Another trip to Sainsbury's for premium sausage meat and all-butter ready-rolled puff pastry!

I think Alistair will be bringing Ewan and Tom to stay for the weekend, which should brighten things up here.

We had leek and potato soup with crisp French bread for dinner, which was more than satisfying.

I realised that I had had very little trouble with my legs and feet over the past couple of days, and had used hardly any gel through the week. Maybe the big red Anapurna socks are doing the trick!

### **Friday 13 April 2018**

Friday 13<sup>th</sup>? Could this be someone's lucky (or *unlucky*) day?

I got up at 7:10 after a restless period and got no greeting from our treacherous dog, who was still crashed out on the bed-settee in the downstairs front bedroom. He did join me once I was into my morning routine, though.

The morning was dull and grey but felt quite mild at 6 degrees with no wind. My feet felt stiff rather than really painful, and we did the usual walk in a very slow 25½ minutes.

### **Monday 16 April 2018**

We had a pretty uneventful weekend, not seeing much of the boys because Alistair was doing stuff with them most of the time. I enjoyed my two lie-ins and got through the weekend with my feet feeling quite a bit better than they have for some time.

I made some Bolognese sauce with a jar of Domio's, adding as an experiment 600 grams of Quorn mince. This was aimed at Ewan, who seemed to have given up meat, but he wasn't here for Saturday dinner. Pat and I tried the mix with linguine but found it very disappointing indeed. The mince was soft and squishy, and made me feel quite nauseous.

So much for the vegetarian option!

I was very sleepless last night, brooding on all sorts of things that probably didn't need brooding over, and was quite relieved when 7:05am came round and I felt able to get up. Having left the front bedroom door closed all day yesterday, I had opened it at bedtime and, as expected, Bailey had immediately gone back to the bed-settee. I was therefore relieved to find him on the 3-seater at the bottom of the stairs when I got down.

It was a lovely sunny morning with the temperature just nudging 10 degrees. My feet were still feeling pretty good and we did the walk in a brisk 19 minutes 58 seconds. - the fastest since mid-March.

With some very promising weather forecast for the next week or two I was all set to get the petrol mower out and give it a good roasting in the sun, but by lunchtime the sky had clouded over.

Pat had to totally frustrating morning with Anton, who refused to allow her to touch any of his bills or other paperwork. Sheffield City Council had asked us to scan and forward more documents to them but this had to go on hold. She arranged to go again tomorrow afternoon when his favourite carer, Andy would be there. He *is* allowed to deal with Anton's bills. We don't know how Anton will react when his affairs are completely taken over by Executor Services in a couple of months...

I finally got round to deactivating my little-used FaceBook account this afternoon. I have only kept it so I can see updates from friends and family, but after the recent revelations about electoral fraud, I want nothing more to do with the blasted thing. Sorry, friends and family!

I did get the mower out after lunch, intending to leave it in the sun, but just out of curiosity I topped up the tank and gave the starter rope a few pulls. The Briggs & Stratton 4-stroke fired up on the third pull as it did every time through the last season, so I attacked the grass with the cut height set at maximum and we were quite pleased with the result – rough but a lot tidier than before the cut. It was odd, though, that hardly any grass found its way into the bag. This will need investigation.

### **Tuesday 17 April 2018**

I slept well with a few loo visits until about 4am. After that I had a battle to get back to sleep and wasn't sure I had managed it at all. I got up at 7:10 feeling really groggy, with a mouth like the bottom of a parrot's cage as someone once said. The prospect of a walk was far from inviting, but once I had got some tea inside me I felt a lot better. The morning was dull – a relief after yesterday's powerful sun – with the temperature at 12 degrees. It had been very windy before I got up but this had begun to subside by the time we started. My left foot felt a little tender but I managed to keep up a good speed and we finished in 19 minutes 31 seconds – quite a lot faster than yesterday – with no serious discomfort. I think my problems are starting to settle down. Knowing my luck they will have eased completely by the time I see Mr Milner in September!

After breakfast I decided to have a trip to the tip. A large builder's bag full of garden refuse has been sitting on the summer-house veranda since the Autumn and the two crates where we keep bottles and jars were almost overflowing. The bag had been almost impossibly heavy before the winter, but when I went down to check it was a lot lighter – definitely viable for me to take to the tip and empty into the green-waste skip. I dragged it up to the house and out onto the driveway, and then filled three woven polypropylene shopping bags with the glass. I quickly took everything from the car boot into the front hall, folded the seats and lined the back with a tarpaulin (also woven polypropylene). I went to the tip. The big bag of garden stuff emptied really easily, unlike the ones full of fresh green stuff I often deal with in summer. The glass was more of a problem, though: there were fewer glass skips and all of them were full to overflowing, so I drove to Sainsbury's and found more skips, fully empty, at the bottom of their car-park. Job done!

Pat came back from Anton's with a stack of documents (bills etc) to be scanned and emailed to Executor Services. I set up a folder to receive them but decided – at Pat's urging – not to start scanning until tomorrow.

### **Wednesday 18 April 2018**

I slept much better last night, still with three visits to the loo but having no trouble getting back to sleep. Once I was awake sometime after 6am I catnapped in a very relaxed position and didn't find any family issues on which to beat myself up. I got up at 7:05 feeling reasonably well and we got off for our walk quite early.

The soles of my feet felt sore and the discomfort increased as we walked, with the whole left ankle area aching every time I put the foot down. Nevertheless we got round, though much more slowly than Monday and Tuesday: 21 minutes 39 seconds. I decided that the problem might have

been that I had laced my shoes a little too tightly, and the pain eased as soon as I unlaced them..

When I got to the desk I was greeted by the fat envelope of Anton's documents which I had left on the desk the night before. This looked like being a fairly unexciting morning – and it was. Coffee time was long delayed by the time I had scanned 33 sides of A4 and attached them to three emails.. At midday I was still waiting for Dan to acknowledge the third batch!

I eventually got all the pages sent and acknowledged and was able to move onto other things, including putting the big garden refuse bags out of sight behind the summer house/shed and sweeping the veranda.

The temperature rose quickly and by 3:30pm it was close to 25 degrees! It looked as if we should move the garden furniture back into its summer positions, so I brought the small hardwood table and two chairs up to the terrace. This came in useful as Aidan called in to collect his birthday (50<sup>th</sup>) presents and cards and we were able to sit out and chat for an hour or so. The heat wasn't at all oppressive – just very pleasant after days of nasty raw winds.

I got the rechargeable garden multi-tool out and fitted the edge trimmer, which enabled me to cut all the bits of grass the mighty Atco hadn't reached.

We had already decided to have a drink before he arrived – a 'nearly Pimms' for Pat and a double G&T for me (to be followed by a second), with assorted crispy things and olives. In the end that was the nearest we got to an evening meal.

### **Thursday 19 April 2018**

I had a decent night's sleep in spite of five trips to the loo, and the last hour from about 6am was a pleasant drift in and out of light sleep with no worrying about anything much. What more could I ask?

I got up at 7:05am to see a bright, sunny morning with a temperature of 11 degrees. I decided to put my ski jacket away for the rest of the year and transferred doggy poo bags and treats to my old faithful DuoFold fleece.

My feet were aching quite badly once I started walking around the house, with the right sole feeling bruised and the whole left ankle (the 'fused' one!) hurting all over. I also started sneezing, feeling as though I had inhaled something allergenic. When we set out for our walk I was seriously considering cutting it short or turning back when the watch hit 10 minutes, but in the end I managed to finish the usual circuit, taking only 40 seconds longer than yesterday but 2½ minutes longer than this week's fastest time.

There is a lot of garden tidying waiting to be done so, feet permitting, I will try to deal with some of that today, but first I decided to get the rest of the furniture (including the monstrously heavy solid-teak table) back up to its summer positions. The temperature was forecast to match yesterday's, hitting 24 degrees by 2pm, so I wanted to get the heavy stuff done early.

The round table rolls over the pond bridge and across the lawn, so that was in place fairly quickly. I carried the six matching chairs in pairs, but discovered that one had a big problem: a dowel that provides a pivot for folding one of the chairs had been broken. I decided that an improvised repair probably wasn't feasible, so I stashed the faulty chair in the shed. That left five, and the two chairs that came up with the small table yesterday are very similar to the teak ones, giving us a seven-seater garden dining suite.

Next, I discovered that the Roundup ready-mixed sprayer was missing its hose and handset, and I couldn't find it anywhere. I tried improvising with heads from two old and defunct sprayers but the tubing wouldn't stretch even when immersed in boiling water, so I ordered a new three-litre sprayer for £9 from Amazon.

By this time the temperature was up to 24 degrees, so I decided to be gentle with myself (as John Peel used to say) for the rest of the day.

I spent quite a while researching parasols on Amazon and chose a reasonably priced one with its base weights made (or branded) by the German-sounding company that produced my rechargeable cutter and the router Alistair has on his Amazon wishlist – VonHaus. Our milk frother is branded VonShef.

At 3pm, after I had dozed off following lunch, my digital food probe in the kitchen read 26.6 degrees, but the big terra-cotta thermometer in the shade on the end of the wood shed, which is remarkably accurate, was reading closer to 28. I went down to the shed to try to find out where the grass was clogging the mower. I managed to get most of the old dry stuff from last year out.

We managed to eat a sensible dinner of linguine with king prawns and pesto in spite of the heat.

I found the information for my colonoscopy next week, and it turns out that I should have started my low-residue diet today and taken two Senna tablets. The linguine and prawns were fine, but I'm not too sure about the pesto. I take one Senocot tablet routinely every evening but I probably ought to take the two 'proper' Senna tablets tomorrow morning.

### **Friday 20 April 2018**

I managed to sleep quite well in spite of the heat by leaving most of myself exposed to the air. Our loft-conversion bedroom wasn't too hot compared with how it feels in high summer. I guessed that this was because the sun is still relatively low in the sky and doesn't heat the roof tiles so much.

I slept fairly well, with only one trip to the loo before 6am, by keeping most of myself uncovered, and got up at 7:05 as usual. The temperature outside was 12 degrees, with bright sunshine and a gentle north wind.

My feet felt much as they did yesterday, though the pains were less severe, and we managed our usual lap in 21 minutes 25 seconds – nearly a minute quicker than yesterday.

I realised that my postponed colonoscopy is set for next Wednesday, the 25 April. I was under the impression that I hadn't received the diet-and-purgative instruction sheet for the new appointment, so I started out



translating the old one. I had more-or-less finished when I found the new one, and it turns out that I should have started my low-residue diet and taken two Senna tablets yesterday. The linguine and prawns were fine, but I'm not too sure about the pesto. I take one Senocot tablet routinely every evening and last night's had the required effect this morning. However, I decided I probably ought to take the two 'proper' Senna tablets this morning to start the clean-out process, so I took them at 10am.

The food restrictions aren't too dire and seem mainly aimed at avoiding fibre and anything red. I always thought fibre was good for maintaining good throughput, but the plan seems to be to eat only squishy stuff that will fall through under its own weight. I also have to avoid red things – perhaps to avoid stains on the bowel wall? So no brown bread, potato skins, fruit, green vegetables, fruit, nuts or jam with seeds in. Given our recent loss of interest in food this should not be too difficult. I will have to stop eating my muesli and switch to cornflakes for breakfast. I like my breakfast orange juice 'with juicy bits' so I will buy some of the 'smooth' variety, but I can finish the current carton if I sieve the bits out.

I have to stop eating by 1pm on the day before the procedure (Tuesday 24 April) and eat nothing else until after it. Then I take my first litre of Klean-Prep at 3pm and another at 4pm. If I have had a bowel movement before 6pm I take the third litre and then the fourth at 7pm. I am recommended to protect my bum from irritation and soreness (things I am rather prone to) with Vaseline before and during this process. This should clean me out thoroughly with repeated bouts of watery diarrhoea. When Pat had her colonoscopy and endoscopy, she spent a very long time sitting on the loo.

When coffee time arrived, I was delighted to find that one Belgian Lotus Biscoff biscuit, which I eat every morning with each sup of coffee and which we bought in France as Speculoos for years before they appeared in British shops, contains just 0.4 grams of fibre. One of those a day shouldn't compromise my low-residue diet!

Later on, in the afternoon, I wound the cut dept on the mower down and gave the grass a proper cut. The mower collected all the cut grass, which I tipped into the composters, and the lawn looks masses better for its second cut.

There is a farmers market in Retford tomorrow, as it is the third Saturday in April.

### **Saturday 21 April 2018**

Pat and I both slept late this morning, until we were wakened by frenzied barking from Bailey well after 9am. He was reacting to two guys trying to deliver the two heaviest parcels we have ever received, containing the four weights to stabilise the cantilevered parasol I have ordered. I stuggled downstairs and took delivery, and then retired to the loo to deal with the consequences of taking two Senna tablets yesterday morning and a Senocot on last night. The result told me clearly that my bowel was working very well indeed. I took two cups of tea back upstairs and we settled down to recover from the shock awakening.

When I mentioned the possibility of going to Retford Pat wasn't very bothered – she was feeling too weary to bother – but in the end I persuaded her. We broke fast with more tea and just one Lotus biscuit, and as soon as we had parked in Retford headed for King's – the café where we always go for coffee. Two flat whites, a toasted teacake with butter and jam for Pat and a wicked salted caramel and chocolate treat for me later we were ready for the Farmers Market and the Bassetlaw Hospice Charity Shop. We bought quite a lot of meat and some pastries from a stall run by a young woman who was Alistair's partner many years ago and was delighted to see Pat. I picked up some good lightweight leather and cotton rigger's gloves, ideal for the garden, from the tool stall while Pat scoured the clothes rails. On the way back I offered to take her to Tickhill, to our favourite butcher, to get some food to take to Anton's. Somehow the Save the Children shop got onto the agenda as well, so I had rather a long wait in the car and the atmosphere on the way home was a little frosty. It is a mystery to me that women can while away hours picking over other people's discarded clothes!

For dinner we had Dexter Beef sirloin steaks – a large one for me and a smaller one for Pat. For accompaniment, I just went across the road to Pizza King and bought a large bag of fries, which were very good – as were the steaks. For afters, we had cakes from Alistair's ex, which were really sensational – my second experience of salted caramel in one day, without contravening my diet instructions.

### **Monday 23 April 2018**

Pat was looking quite poorly last night, and this morning I had a hard job getting myself awake. My usual weekday routine just didn't work, and I ended up taking Bailey out about half an hour late. My feet felt quite good and we did the usual circuit in 20 minutes 40 seconds, slower than the first two walks last week but quicker than the other three.

There was a card on the doormat when we got back, telling me that a parcel had been left under the car. It turned out to be the cantilever parasol – a very long and very heavy parcel, which took quite some manhandling to get it inside.

I did the beds while Pat was making the usual sandwiches for Anton and then had a fast shower. Once she had left, I got to grips with the parasol, hacking my way into the long carton with a Stanley knife (no wonder American crime writers call them box cutters) and trying to figure out how the heavy steel frame would fit together. I took it outside and laid it on the big teak table, and eventually managed to sort it out. However, there was no way I could get it up single-handed – it was just too long and too heavy. Once I had the bottom of the frame assembled and the monster weights laid on the legs, I had to wait for Pat to get home and stabilise the thing while I fitted the main stem into the base.

I decided I would have to get the thing a fitted cover to protect it from the wind, and ordered one from Amazon.

As a special treat I had a few more documents from Anton's to scan and email to the Council's Executor service.

At a bit of a loss as to what to have for dinner while on my 'low-residue' diet, I suggested fish to Pat. I found a kipper for me and some smoked

mackerel for her after a long search in the freezer. Meanwhile, for lunch, I had a quarter of a large pork pie which we bought at the farmers market on Saturday. The crust wasn't brilliant, but the meat and jelly were very tasty.

Tomorrow's lunch will be my last meal before the colonoscopy, and at the moment I haven't got a clue what I would like. This is to be followed at 3pm by the start of the Klean-Prep treatment – four litres of a powerful purgative to be taken at 3, 4, 6 and 7pm with, if I fancy them, drinks of clear fluids including water, juice (not red) and tea and coffee without milk. This can continue until two hours before my appointment time – 10:45am on Wednesday. The possible complication is that, if I don't have a 'bowel movement' after the first two doses, I shouldn't take any more and should contact the screening team in the morning. That will presumably mean my procedure gets postponed again!

I had a call from the Ford agents to book the car's annual service and MoT. We agreed on Wednesday 9 May.

My kipper and two fried eggs went down a treat! I had forgotten how much I like those smoked herrings. Tomorrow? We will see...

## **Tuesday 24 April 2018**

With the colonoscopy looming, I had a restless hour or so in bed before getting up at 7:10am. Apart from anything else, I couldn't remember exactly what the régime is for the next 24 hours. On the face of it, it seems I will have no calorie intake from 1pm today, and I was wondering if I would be allowed a few glucose tablets. As these would be absorbed directly through the walls of my stomach and maybe my small intestine and cannot see them leaving any confusing traces in the colon. I felt quite tired after getting up and this persisted past the walk.

It was a dull start to the morning, with the temperature at 9 degrees but dry with no wind. We got round the standard circuit without incident in 21 minutes 6 seconds, with my left leg and foot protesting but not too badly.

Looking out of the window I wondered what the range of adjustment was for the parasol, so I went out and had a fiddle and managed to get it to its tallest and narrowest configuration which should fit the cover I ordered yesterday. A rub of wax would have helped the tubes to slide in their fittings.

I just checked my instructions from the screening clinic and discovered that I should have been taking two Senna tablets each night since the diet began. I think I took one for the first couple of nights and then decided I should stop. The error is due to the fact that I was using the instruction sheet for the old appointment until I found the new one, which is different! I immediately took two and hoped that, with this afternoon's purge, everything will be okay. It will be bad news if the procedure has to be aborted as soon as they get a look up my bum!

I had my last meal of smoked salmon and crab terrine with pappy white bread just before 1pm and, at 3pm, started the KleanPrep purgative, mixing the first of the four sachets in a litre of cold water and drinking a quarter of a litre every 15 minutes.

The mixture tasted subtly unpleasant – a hint of sweetness, another of saltiness and a broad hint of bitterness at the back of the tongue. I tried adding some of Pat's elderflower cordial but stopped bothering and put up with the ordeal from then on.

The second sachet was mixed at 4pm and drunk in four glasses. Sometime around the end of the second hour my guts began to feel disturbed, and from then on the frequency of my visits to the loo increased steadily. I passed the test of 'having a bowel movement' in the interval between 5pm and 6pm, when the second round of four sachets began. I went to the loo at steadily shortening intervals, producing violent squirts or totally liquid but rather gritty diarrhoea. My last meal seemed to have vanished completely.

As expected, this was a pretty miserable evening, with nothing to drink but the nasty stuff itself and plain water. The last dose was taken at 8pm, much to my relief, but the loo visits just became more and more frequent. There were minor accidents when I didn't make it to the loo in time, when I ended up having to rinse out my boxers. I stayed up later than usual, and sometime after 11pm I decided it might be safe to go to bed.

### **Wednesday 25 April 2018**

I had to get up and use the loo at about 2:30am. I didn't have time to go downstairs so I used the one in the en-suite and, as far as I could tell, managed this without disturbing Pat. I got up to pee at around 4am and couldn't get back to sleep after that. I kept getting hints from my bum but managed to keep it clenched shut, but shortly before 6am I decided I had better go down for a proper bathroom visit. I was relieved to find that the quantity of diarrhoea had reduced greatly, but I decided to stay up. I had a cup of black tea, which I didn't really enjoy and which left my tongue dry and bitter-tasting. I checked various Google links to see if I was allowed any food or decent drink before the colonoscopy. I wasn't. I took Pat a cup of tea *-with milk* – at around 7am and got dressed in my scruffs so I could go out and set up the satnav in the car.

I was feeling shaky and a bit light-headed, so I decided to try a couple of glucose tablets which seemed to help. Their mild fruity taste was refreshing, too.

I was due at Doncaster Royal Infirmary at 10:35, The letter stated, in capital letters and rather ominously, THIS IS YOUR ARRIVAL TIME AND NOT YOUR PROCEDURE TIME. I supposed I would be in a queue of patients and each procedure might throw up its own complications. Knowing how difficult parking is at DRI I decided we should leave at about 9:15 – an hour and a quarter from now.

I wasn't too bothered about the procedure itself, but would be very glad when it was over and we couldn't stop off at the hospital restaurant for a decent coffee and a snack before heading home (I doubted if I would feel up to any diversions and expected I would just want to curl up, relax and try to get back to normal).

The satnav was convinced that we would get to DRI in just over half an hour, but we set off as planned anyway. We could always put off time once we got parked (assuming we did!) and then just camp in the Endoscopy Suite waiting room.

The first surprise was that DRI had turned every bit of spare lane on their huge network of roads into paid parking areas, and we managed to get a space quite quickly. Then a nice lady who was just leaving gave us a ticket with several hours left on it. We made a mental note of its expiry time so that one of us could come back out and get another ticket if things dragged on for too long.

DRI, which is the sister hospital of our local hospital, Bassetlaw, is vast, with miles of corridors, but its signage is really good and we had no trouble finding the Endoscopy Suite. Although we were very early I got admitted quite quickly and was busy filling in forms, answering questions and having various functions (pulse, blood pressure etc) tested for quite a while. I never cease to be amazed at the amount of printed and written information the NHS collects and stores. I was assured that it all does get onto computers eventually, though.

I didn't bother keeping track of the time, but everything seemed to be moving quite quickly. We were installed in a room with an en-suite loo where I could change ready for the procedure. The hospital gown was the usual pretty-patterned design, opening at the back with two or three ties, but the pants ere new to me: thin paper shorts, very baggy and loose, with a sort of hatchway at the back – obviously designed specifically for access to the bum. I was offered sedation, but assured them that I would be happy with gas-and-air. This was, after all, the man who had undergone three invasive operations, three on ankles and one on a knee with only spinal local anaesthetic (except that the little Chinese lady anaesthetist who did me for the knee couldn't find my spinal cord and had to give me a general in the end). I like to know what is being done to me as surgery goes on, and a tube up my bum would be nowhere near as invasive as my orthopaedic surgeons' scalpels and saws.

The actual procedure was pretty painless, with things going into and out of my anus feeling pretty much like passing stools. I could follow progress on a large colour LCD screen and take a pull on the Entonox inhaler if there was any pain, which there was but only from my colon being inflated as air was pumped in. I was asked to try to keep the air in but this was difficult, so I let rip with a few long and really resonant farts. I apologised for these, but the lovely nurse who was looking after me assured me that 'trumps' were bound to happen. The inside of my bowel looked clean, pink and healthy, so the horrors of yesterday had obviously done what was required. Once the preliminary inspection was completed, the surgeon cut out three or four polyps. He said that he would need to get rid of a couple more but this would need a second colonoscopy in a few weeks. He gave me a prescription for an alternative purgative to be taken before the next appointment and told me that I should take two Senna tablets every night at the same time. All the polyps would be checked for any signs of malignancy, so fingers crossed! He warned me that there could be some blood-loss for the next couple of days.

When things were over I was wheeled to the recovery ward and given first a cup of rather lukewarm water and then one of decent tea with a small packet of biscuits – fruit shortcake, which I haven't had for years. After half an hour I was told that I could get dressed and was conducted to a small waiting room where I found Pat waiting. Once it was confirmed that I was free to go we followed the signs to the hospital pharmacy. I was

concerned that our parking picket would have expired, so I left Pat to collect the medication while I went to check the car, which turned out to be very close to the pharmacy. It hadn't been towed away and there was nothing under the wiper, so I headed back to collect Pat and found her already out of the building and on the way. I felt fine about driving, and we were home in just over half an hour. The satnav quickly got us out of Doncaster and I was still 'trumping' merrily when we got back, so quite a lot of air must have been left in my colon.

It was wonderful to be home and able to drink tea with milk and eat anything I wanted after yesterday's horrible starving and purging.

Later on, I felt the need to go to the loo. I produced very little apart from raucous wind but left a small puddle of bloody debris at the bottom of the pan.

We had fish fingers and left-over chip-shop chips from the freezer for dinner, all very welcome after the cruel treatment I had given my digestive system.

### **Thursday 26 April 2018**

I slept pretty well last night and allowed myself an hour's lie-in before giving the dog a much-appreciated walk – a roundabout one, slightly longer than the usual ones, because we had mail to post. By the time we got back my feet felt really painful, perhaps because of the huge distance I walked around the DRI yesterday.

My morning visit to the loo was fairly unproductive but a little bloody.

When Pat got down she told me I had left some blood staining my bottom sheet and the mattress cover. I had a vague recollection of letting go a few loud farts during the night, so the blood had probably blown out with them!

I really enjoyed my muesli, prunes and yogurt for breakfast. The corn flakes had made a pleasant change, but it was good to be back to a normal diet. I raided the fridge for a fast lunch, eating some of the left-over pork pie from Saturday's visit to the Farmers Market. The crust was damp and doughy and the meat filling wasn't very exciting, so I finished what was left of the Parma ham, salami and chorizo I had been eating before The Great Fast began. Dessert was a small bar of Aldi's milk chocolate and one of the incredible marzipan chocolate Pat bought me for my birthday (or Easter, or Valentine's, or whenever).

We had another of our very short shopping lists with some real essentials on it, so in the middle of the afternoon I went up to the Co-op, knowing that some of the items probably wouldn't be available – particularly the chicken wings needed for tomorrow's dinner (see next paragraph). Sure enough, having failed to get Birds Eye's top of the range fish fingers and petits pois, I set out for Sainsbury's. The hikes round the two supermarkets, added to however many miles we did round the corridors of DRI yesterday, left my legs and feet feeling pretty battered.

The slab of pork belly we bought at the Farmwrs' Market was defrosting for tonight's dinner, but in the end we decided to save it for Saturday or Sunday after wings and wedges on Friday. Pat suggested king prawns with either linguine or Chinese noodles. This cost me even more time on my

feet as I sliced a red onion and several cloves of garlic, fried them gently and then cooked two wafers of noodles. When everything else was done I fried two packs of delicious-looking prawns gently just until they were pink and mixed them with the noodles. The result was delicious, but my feet were quite painful.

### **Friday 27 April 2018**

I slept well, waking for a pee at around 6am and then falling asleep again. When I looked at the time it was 7:15 and I needed another pee, so I got up. It was a dull morning with the thermometer at 6 degrees. I felt absolutely exhausted but I did manage to get us out for a rather late walk. My legs and feet really were struggling, so I decided to walk for ten minutes and then turn back. I had a bit of a struggle bagging Bailey's second poo, getting my hands dirty and failing to wipe them completely clean on damp grass. This wasted quite a bit of time but we got home in a time of 21¾ minutes. At least the poor dog got some distance under his paws.

I don't know quite where the exhaustion is coming from, except that I slept very badly on the night before the colonoscopy and the hospital experience was probably more stressful than it seemed. I think this weekend is going to have to be a very lazy one, and there is a Grand Prix to help with that. I have got the wings and wedges to cook tonight, but that isn't exactly a major task.

I went across to the shop before lunch to get two bottles of Tropicana Trop50, Pat's favourite low-sugar breakfast juice which neither the Co-op nor Sainsbury's seem to be selling any more. I also wanted a carton of creamy coleslaw to go with the wings. My feet, which had been pretty painful for most of the morning, had calmed down by then and did the return journey without too much grief.

Sometime later I finally did what I have been intending to do for ages: my neck, shoulder and back workout, and felt a lot better once this was done. I need to get into a routine of doing this at least once a day every day, or every weekday anyway.

Pat had made some Melba Toast at the weekend and we had this with some cheese. The Lincolnshire Poacher Double Barrel and Colston Basset Stilton I bought at the Farmers Market went down really well with that, and I even found a rather elderly mince pie to follow.

Pat had started to sort out her wardrobe in our upstairs bedroom and decided to paint the back of it, which includes a door to the front loft. I found her some brilliant white silk emulsion and some decent brushes for the job. By 3:15pm the paint was dry and she was beginning to put stuff back in the wardrobe – a pretty massive job.

The wings and wedges were disappointing because the oven of our handsome range cooker just doesn't deliver the goods. The light stayed on and never went out once to indicate that the target temperature had been reached. So the skin on the wings never really browned or got crisp and the wedges didn't brown much either. Time for a chat with Brian Habershon, our local appliance engineer..

## **Saturday 28 April 2018**

We had a pleasant lie-in this morning, and it was Pat who decided to get up and make tea.

Just when it looked as if we might have a lazy day she announced that she wanted to spring-clean our bedroom, an operation that involved moving two monstrously heavy beds, two hefty bedside cabinets and one solid and absolutely full blanket box. I absolutely forbade her from doing the shifting. I also took the heavy Sebo vacuum cleaner up.

She had asked me to scan some prized pictures and print them onto cards she could use for family birthdays. I did this, employing my long-acquired skills with PhotoShop and much longer-ago acquired the ones with a cutting board, a steel rule and a Stanley knife with a fresh blade, but was horribly aware of how badly my vision is deteriorating. I think the main problem is the floaters which I have had since my twenties. I have an appointment with Mr Dinakaran, the consultant eye specialist at Bassetlaw hospital – the one who sent me for a brain scan a few months ago! - on the 16 May, and will be alerting him to my growing sight problems.

I have done this operation several times before and knew how to move everything around so that the whole floor could have a thorough vacuuming – essential because we inherited it with very dense long-pile carpeting. So I did this bit while Pat started sorting the unwanted clothes from her wardrobes into charity bags, and when I had finished I had a pretty ruthless go at my wardrobes, too. She was determined to do everything else, so I got to watch the Azerbaijan Grand Prix qualifying. She was still busy at 5pm, cleaning the en-suite shower room.

I had decided to postpone roasting the pork belly until tomorrow evening and do omelettes with cheese, mushrooms and bacon tonight. We had a fresh delivery of new-laid eggs from our neighbour across the road, so I know the omelettes will be delicious.

Writing that paragraph reminded me that I thought I might have found my old omelette pan (or its handle, at least) at the back of a kitchen cupboard a few weeks ago but had not tried getting it out. I went back for another go, and it was indeed the professional pan I bought from a professional catering supply shop (in either Victoria Street or Shaftesbury Avenue) when I moved into my little flat on the edge of Hampstead shortly after my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. The pan was black and sticky and disgusting.

I showed it to Pat and she reminded me that we had bought an oven-cleaning package a year or two ago. The idea was to put the oven shelves in a thick plastic bag, put on the plastic gloves provided, squirt thick caustic goo over it, seal the bag and rub the goo all over everything inside. I decided that a Brabantia bin liner would probably do, and did this with my dear old pan, sealing the bag with a strong twisty to leave at least overnight, and rubbing the caustic goo all over the pan through the bag. The bag had ventilation holes near the top, so I had to be particularly careful to ensure that the twisty was well below the holes. With that done, I set about prepping the omelettes, which I would have to cook in one of our professional non-stick frying pans bought from Nisbets – maybe for the last time...



## Monday 30 April 2018

After a lie-in, we had a mostly lazy Sunday. Towards midday I went to the Co-op to get veg for the evening meal and various hopefully-tempting treats for Anton. I also got the Sunday paper and Anton's milk, so I managed to avoid the walk to the OneStop Shop.

Later in the day, before preparing for a Sunday roast of pork belly, mashed Maris Pipers, pointy cabbage, slim carrots, round French beans and fake gravy (just half an onion and chopped garlic sweated in butter which was made into a roux and then a sauce with boiling water and Marigold Bouillon Powder and a gravy with old-fashioned browning – no contribution from the meat!), I liberated my omelette pan from its bag of nasty caustic and now dark brown gel. This had removed quite a lot of burnt-on fat, but even after a hot wash and a good scrub it was clear that the pan would never be usable and did not deserve a place hanging in the kitchen as a souvenir. Rather sadly, I consigned it to the dustbin.

The meal was very enjoyable, with well-roasted pork, but even following Hugh Whittly-Fartingstall's instructions had not delivered good crackling. What is wrong with modern pigs?

I had a good night's sleep, even with three barely-remembered loo visits, and snapped fully awake at 7:15am. My mouth was dry and I really felt groggy. I was sorely tempted to roll over but forced myself out of bed. At least the feet were feeling reasonable. The morning was dull, breezy and cold at 5 degrees.

I wanted to finish washing the tin the pork had been cooked and which had been soaking overnight, but I couldn't get any hot water out of the kitchen tap. The combi boiler seemed to have lost the plot. After fiddling for a while I went through to the bathroom and left the basin hot tap running while I sat on the loo, wiped my bum and transferred to the bidet, which gave me a freezing cold spray.

Back in the kitchen I fiddled with the tap some more, then went to twiddle the knobs on the boiler. The tap delivered intermittent bursts of lukewarm water, so I went back and switched the boiler off and on, following my usual practice with computers which were misbehaving – a hard reset. The water came out better, but not very hot.

Bailey and I had a decent walk in spite of the cold, with two doggy encounters: one with the fluffy shepherd, which went as usual, and another with a little pug which was also quite friendly.

After breakfast, while Pat was sorting out food for Anton, I started sorting out the home-made anniversary card I had been planning for Pat. I had searched the PC yesterday for the wedding invitation artwork I had produced twelve years ago (some clever stuff with a stolen stylised lily-of-the-valley image) and the folder containing all the photos – mine (mostly taken for me on my Canon DSLR by my old colleague and dear friend Ian) and others from various friends and family members. I found a nice one of the two of us in front of Fischers Baslow Hall's magnificent magnolia tree

I had ordered a 100-sheet pack of 160gsm card, which arrived yesterday. This turned out to be brilliantly white with a nice silky sheen.

Once Pat had left, I started figuring out how to print the front of the card and the right-hand page inside on opposite sides of an A4 sheet using PhotoShop. The task of printing the front of the card on one side and the right-hand inside page on the other was complicated but I managed by inverting both images and using the software's clever margin management tools. Once folded, the card looked very professional. I haven't *quite* lost my skills as a computer-based artist!

Then I phoned our local boiler maintenance service, but their engineer would not be able to get to us until tomorrow afternoon. As this will be our actual anniversary day, we had planned a visit to the cinema followed by celebration food shopping at M&S for tomorrow, so this was pretty inconvenient.

I had a call from Pat saying the car had been behaving oddly, so I just told her to come home as quickly and safely as she could. I noticed yesterday that the 'Engine systems message' was on constantly (it has always appeared intermittently and the garage has never been able to find out why!) and that the car didn't seem to be pulling quite as strongly as it usually does (something that has also been happening now and again for a while), but Pat thought the steering might be playing up again, too. Luckily it is booked in for its annual service and MoT next Wednesday.

I drove into town later to visit M&S for lots of red roses and WH Smith for some romantic wrapping paper. The car behaved more-or-less normally, and should hold up until Wednesday's service.

I left the roses standing in a bucket with water in the bottom at the end of the garage until early tomorrow morning.

We more-or-less finished the pork, sliced very thinly, with reheated veg and gravy – most enjoyable. Tomorrow's dinner will be something delicious bought from M&S after the cinema.

### **Tuesday 1 May 2018**

I got up at 7am to make time for wrapping Pat's flowers and left them on the kitchen table ready for her. She was delighted, and very impressed with her personalised card.

We decided to visit the Savoy cinema to see *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* – and improbably named film which turned out to be very enjoyable and quite moving. We had hot dogs delivered to our seats before the film started and scoffed the sweets and Pepsi we had bought in the way in. On the way home we stopped at M&S to buy some goodies for dinner, with a main meal of linguine and big king prawns (lots of them) and some delicious choux buns for afters. All this was washed down with most of a bottle of Prosecco, so a fitting celebratory dinner for our 12<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

### **Wednesday 2 May 2018**

The boiler engineer arrived, but was the bringer of bad news: he needed a new part, which would take 48 hours to arrive, and Monday is a bank holiday so we would be without all but a dribble of warm water until Tuesday. With Pat's love of her showers and care for her hair this was not a welcome outcome. I was a bit short with the boss of the maintenance service, but there was nothing she could do.

We were expecting Pat's sister Jackie and husband Bob for morning coffee, but they were delayed. Bob drove us up to Tickhill, where I had booked a table for lunch at Rocco's Italian restaurant to celebrate our anniversary and Pat's birthday. We all enjoyed our authentic Italian dishes and agreed that we ought to do this more often. Needless to say, we didn't need to bother with dinner.

### **Thursday 3 May 2018**

I got up at 7:05 to be greeted by a beautiful sunny morning, though cool at around 5 degrees. Bailey and I did a slightly longer walk than usual to post two birthday cards, but in a good time of just under 22 minutes.

I needed to get a birthday card and a few items of celebration food for tomorrow, and started with Sainsbury's, quite prepared to a visit to town for a cake. However, I found a lovely madeira cake piped all over with pink roses, and when I got home Pat was thrilled to bits!

On the way into Sainsbury's I had filled the five-litre can I keep for the mower with super-grade petrol, trying to avoid getting the car smelly by putting the can in two carrier bags and tying them tightly. Once we had unpacked the shopping – a really modest lot for me – I got changed, put the can in the shed and fired up the mighty Atco Admiral. The grass had grown quite quickly since the first cut and looked a bit ragged when I had finished. There were dry-looking patches, but there was no rain in the immediate forecast.

As a birthday present I sent Pat to the hairdresser with £80 in her purse. She came back after an hour and a half fairly satisfied and with £10 change for me.

We had a pack of M&SW *Coquilles St-Jacques* between us for dinner, followed by the remaining two choux buns we had left when we had the anniversary dinner on Tuesday.

### **Friday 4 May 2018**

I checked the time at 5:35am after a restful night with, as far as I could recall, *no* visits to the loo – strange because my bladder was pretty active all day yesterday. When I got up later I checked the log and this confirmed a count of zero. I stayed where I was, awake but drifting, and time seemed to be passing incredibly slowly. The last 20 minutes from 6:45 to 7:05 felt as if they were lasting forever, and I got up with no strain.

I leaned Pat's card against the fruit basket, concealing the smaller card with the £100 Amazon gift card which is her main present as she had no idea what she wanted for her birthday.

It was a beautiful morning, warmer than yesterday at 10 degrees with a cloudless blue sky and bright sunshine – nothing like the forecast on the BBC weather app. I had some pain on the inside of the left ankle, so I pushed the sock down and rubbed in a generous blob of ibuprofen gel. The foot felt quite good when we set out, and we completed the usual route in a brisk 19 minutes 57 seconds. We had a noisy passage past the corgis behind their gate and a brief and gentle encounter with the long-haired Shepherd, but otherwise the walk was uneventful.

At 5:30pm we were waiting for Alistair to arrive with the boys – or to contact us to let us know when they would arrive – but as he was working until 6pm (I think!) in Dewsbury and had to get across to Buxton – quite a bit further than Buxton from here – to collect them, we have no real idea when they are likely to arrive, or whether they would have eaten at home.

In the end we had the same takeaway routine as usual – pizzas and friend chicken.

The boys thoroughly enjoyed the hot summer weather, playing outside for ages. Tom discovered that the huge laurel in the border of our back garden is completely hollow inside and set about creating a den. This is now on the agenda for their next visit.

Ewan had a party on Saturday afternoon so they had to leave here sometime after lunch. They actually stayed quite a bit longer so we had time for a small tea and to sing 'Happy Birthday' to Pat while she blows the candles out on her rosy cake.

When they had gone I got the hose out and gave all the pots a good watering

### **Monday 7 May 2018**

Late Saturday afternoon was sunny and searingly hot, which gave us a chance to test the new parasol and work out how to adjust its position. It proved to be a bit of a handful to set up and adjust but provided plenty of shade for four when Aidan and Donni visited to give Pat her birthday gifts.

It was even busier yesterday as we spent all day outside. The temperature has been pretty crazy, and as I write this at 5pm it is just a whisker below 30 degrees.

I was restless from 5am onwards and decided to get at at 7:05 in spite of the bank holiday offering a valid excuse not to walk the dog. The temperature was about 13 degrees so I decided not to wear a jacket or a sweatshirt. I stuffed my usual armoury of poo bags and doggy-treats in my left jogger pocket and my phone in the right one. The weather was glorious and the walk was totally uneventful – obviously just about everyone had decided to give in to holiday temptation! We got round in 20½ minutes.

Pat has been suffering with a urinary infection for the past few days, and I had told her that there was no way she was driving to Anton's in Sheffield alone. We stopped at the Co-op for three or four odd items of shopping plus some stuff for Anton.

We had a repeat of the newly-predictable engine malfunction. The car took us up to the Co-op without an 'Engine Systems Fault' message, accelerating up the main road impressively, but when I restarted the engine to come home the message was back and performance was much less impressive. It went away while at Anton's and we had an excellent drive back. The pattern seems consistent, so I hope this will enable the garage to figure it out on Wednesday. There have been no repeats of Pat's power-steering problems.

It was too hot to sit out for the whole of this afternoon, so we took refuge indoors. In spite of feeling rough, Pat spent an hour preparing a Salade Niçoise for tonight's dinner.

## **Tuesday 8 May 2018**

Pat went out shopping with Sue and Steph, and managed to use up most of the day. I did my best to stay cool, experimenting with the cantilever parasol. Later on I emptied the car completely, ready for its service and MoT day tomorrow.

## **Wednesday 9 May 2018**

After skipping the walks for two days I decided to squeeze one in between getting up and taking the car to the garage. I got up at about 6:45 and we had a very quiet walk, only meeting one dog – a little black Cocker called Henry. I had plenty of time to lay up for breakfast and eat mine before setting out for the Ford garage. My courtesy car turned out to be a bright red 2018 Kia, which was useful as we had been talking about getting one to replace the Focus. This plan was right out of the window by the time I got home, mostly because the gearchange was very sticky and difficult to move and the seat was too low and didn't appear to have a height adjustment. I also found the steering abnormally light..

Pat spent the morning sorting all sorts of stuff out, so I decided to attack the tray on the study desk. My first job was to find all the paper relating to my colonoscopy, because I needed to return the call which Pat had taken a week or two ago. I eventually found a letter with the phone numbers for the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme's main office in Sheffield and arranged my second procedure for the 5 June. Then I found all Bailey's paperwork and booked him in for vaccinations and his annual check-up on the 1 June. The tray looked a lot tidier, as did my *Outlook* calendar, and I felt more at ease having got all my most pressing jobs done.

I got the call from Megan at the garage to say the car was ready at 5pm. I had a chat with the service manager who told me that the service had gone well with nothing abnormal cropping up. The MoT was also passed with flying colours. However, they could only guess at the reasons for the engine losing power – possibly a fuel pump malfunction? - and the power steering failures. They said that both systems were buried deeply in the scary maze below the bonnet and definitive investigations would be expensive. My reaction was to say that maybe now was the time, with a full main dealer's service history and a clean MoT, to trade the car in as soon as possible.

The drive back into town confirmed my views on the Kia. The gears did seem to have eased a bit, and the car was brand new, so maybe driving it had loosened things up, but not thanks!

When I was driving home the engine hiccupped a few times. I saw that the 'ENGINE SYSTEMS FAULT' message had come back on and we were back in 'Limp Mode'. I took a long route home to test things and got home feeling rather sad, because the car really didn't feel like itself. I have enjoyed the Focus with its sporty handling and and ballsy 1.8 diesel very much, so the replacement will have to be something a bit special, but it is going to have to go without delay.

Pat had cooked some sea bass fillets with new potatoes, but the fish had obviously been in the freezer far too long, so dinner was disappointing.

## **Thursday 10 May 2018**

I was awake early and feeling pretty anxious about the car, so I got up at 7am. My left foot had been very painful at bedtime, having needed a dollop of Ibuprofen gel during the evening. I had put some more on and that allowed me to relax when I got my head down. I had only got up twice to pee, once with a welcome sight of heavy rain on the en-suite window. Bailey and I got round our route in 19 minutes 58 seconds.

I did his monthly flea treatment after breakfast, after giving him his annual dose of four worming tablets before dinner last night. I had moulded them into balls of grated Cheddar and he had eaten them without protest (swallowed them whole, probably!).

After lunch we decided to go car-hunting, and the first likely garage we reached was our local branch of Evans Halshaw, one of the biggest chain used-car dealers in the country. There were literally hundreds of cars on display but far more diesels than petrol-burners. We had decided to try a switch to the latter, but that restricted our choice dramatically. We got a good idea of prices, though, and I was encouraged by the monthly instalment rate shown on each car's information sheet. It would obviously make sense to use the firm's finance package rather than burying our entire savings. This would allow us to go as high as £10,000.

When we had almost given up, we found a black Mercedes B180, B being the second-smallest class Mercedes makes. It was a compact hatchback of similar size to our Focus and looked very attractive from the outside. After looking for and failing to find any blemishes, inside or out, and taking it for a ten-minute test drive, I had almost talked myself into buying it. Some more time spent discussing the matter with the salesman tipped the balance. The part-exchange value quoted for the Focus was disappointing, but he managed to argue the colleague who determined that into a slightly more generous figure and we eventually shook hands. I paid a £200 deposit, and will be collecting the car at lunchtime tomorrow.

We were quite jittery about this rash decision, but went to bed without talking ourselves out of it.

## **Friday 11 May 2018**

I woke up for a pee sometime after 3am and caught myself thinking about how to solve the problem of the Focus. Then the penny dropped, and I went back to worry about buying the Merc! It took me a long time to get back to sleep and I woke up very early for some more worrying.

I got up at 7am on a cloudy but bright morning with the temperature at a friendly 7 degrees – cool enough for me to wear my fleece jacket which has plenty of pockets. Without it I spend half our walks pulling up my joggers and re-tying the drawstring just because my iPhone is rather heavy! We did the usual walk in 20 minutes 29 seconds (two poo-stops!).

I was due to swop cars at 12:30, but I got a call from the salesman to say that the bank supplying my credit has a backlog and the car won't be available for collection until midday tomorrow. Pathetic!

It looks as if the Merc is going to be quite economical and not very polluting. Emissions are so low that the annual road tax is a mere £20, and the average fuel consumption is 68.9mpg – the Focus's recorded

long-term average is only about 44.2, so we will be getting almost 50% more miles out of every gallon and won't need to feel so guilty for driving a diesel. Once I had written this I tried to work out the relative costs of 100 miles in each car but my mathematical instincts seemed to have deserted me. However, I did eventually work out that the Merc will use only 1.45 gallons per 100 miles where the Focus used 2.26 gallons per 100 miles. That is a very significant saving of around 40% on every comparable journey.

By midday I was beginning to get seriously fed up, but at least I had successfully sorted out the insurance with Aviva, so that both the Focus and the Merc will all be covered all day tomorrow. I tried to add the new vehicle online but ended up with a real human being handling it.

### **Saturday 12 May 2018**

The 'picking-up' process was much longer than we expected, with acres of paperwork to go through and then a long wait until Lloyds Bank, the lender got the whole sale of the car visibly in the garage's bank. Eventually, though, we were waved on our way and did a wander round the neighbourhood to get used to the car. I was absolutely beautiful to drive – quiet, smooth, responsive and powerful. We phoned Aidan and he asked us to drop by, so we went and had a rather weird lunch with him and Donni (they are experimenting with a Vegan diet!). Aidan was hugely impressed with the car, as expected.

Once we got home I started hunting online for an Owner's Manual, as the garage had not collected one from the previous owner. Not much luck there, unless I wanted to spend £35 on eBay as Mercedes didn't offer one for sale! I found the online 'interactive' manual eventually but it wasn't very friendly. I will put the pressure on the garage to find me one, either from the previous owner or through the trade. I would get an opportunity to do this as Pat had left her jacket there in all the excitement.

### **Sunday 13 May 2018**

Pat's 'driving lesson' was to drive the car to the garage and back, which went really well. I had adjusted the seat and wheel to suit me and, as with the Focus, she just needed to slide the seat forward to suit her.

I caught up with our salesman and raised the issue of the manual rather forcefully, saying that the car's electronics really were too complicated to manage without detailed instructions. He promised to get a manual, saying that several branches of their group are Mercedes garages.

After putting everything we always carry in the car in the Merc, I spent quite a long time studying the online Manual. I learned a lot, but it was no substitute for a printed book!

While doing this I realised that Pat wasn't feeling well. She checked her blood glucose and came up with a scary level of just over 3 – half what it is on a good day and quite severe hypoglycaemia. I insisted on her taking two or three glucose tablets and a biscuit with a cup of tea and hoped she would improve without having to go to A&E. She slept for a long time on the settee and was looking a little better when she woke up, but still quite unwell.

### **Monday 14 May 2018**

I slept better last night but was still awake very early having a general 'think' about car issues.

Pat looked better when I checked her. I had foreseen doing a solo food delivery to Anton.

It was a beautiful sunny morning with a temperature of 9 degrees, and Bailey and I did the walk in 21 minutes 6 seconds – but only after I had rubbed Voltarol gel into the inside of my left ('fused') ankle, which was quite sore.

Pat was up before we got back and looked better, but was still feeling under the weather. She had already laid the table for breakfast and made progress with the usual food for Anton.

I had insisted that I would drive her to Anton's last night and I stuck to this. I had also agreed that we would go and see Barney after the duty call.

I enjoyed the familiar drive across to Sheffield in the Merc, which drove beautifully.

Anton was impossible. He refused to be taken to the Post Office to pay his bills, although his phone had already been cut off for outgoing calls. Fortunately it was ok for incoming ones, so my regular Sunday fax had arrived last night. Pat spent some time trying to make arrangements for a safety check by the fire service and the housing contractors for today, alerting Rachael to see if she could get his support worker here earlier. She seemed to have managed to get across to Anton that he needed to watch out for his lights flashing when the doorbell was rung at about 1:30pm today.

The drive to Barney's round the city centre went well. I was still getting used to the car's rather fierce brakes but we got across town without problems.

We had a pleasant couple of hours with Pat's amazing grandson, who is fully recovered from his recent open-heart surgery, and then drove back round the ring road to the M1 which gave me a chance to let the car rip. It really is very good indeed. Just before we got the motorway way we stopped at Whitby's for a superb fish-and-chip lunch. Normally I would have had a beer with this but I stayed alcohol-free as I needed to concentrate on driving.

I spent quite a while during the afternoon sorting my appointments out. I have an ophthalmology consultation tomorrow at 3:20pm, a vet's appointment for Bailey's annual checkup and immunisations on Friday 1 June, my second colonoscopy on Tuesday 5 June and a Cardiology consultation on the 8 June. I also sorted out the preparations for the colonoscopy, which will be different this time as I have a liquid laxative to take for the five days of my low-residue diet thanks to my bowel not being quite clean last time. What jolly fun!

## **Tuesday 15 May 2018**

I don't know what heppened to this morning's diary entry – too excited about the car, I guess!



We needed a bit of shopping today so I popped to the Co-op before lunch, enjoying the car even more than I did yesterday. The air-conditioning comes into play in a few seconds, which was brilliant on a hot sunny day like today. When I got home I realised that I had left a nine-pack of Andrex toilet rolls at the checkout, so I had an excuse for another little run up the road. There was another Merc in the Co-op carpark and then another pulled in as I was leaving. Common as muck, these German cars!

The car has a phenomenally tight turning circle (accessed by incredibly light steering), making parking and turning it round in our forecourt very quick and easy.

My only real criticism so far is that the boot is much smaller than the Focus's, but this afternoon, with the aid of the online Manual, I got my head round folding the rear seats and the resulting space is pretty huge, thank goodness!

The Manual obviously covers quite a few variants, and the release catches mentioned weren't there but fabric loops which are pulled to release the seat backs were. The seat squabs don't fold up but the space is quite generous with the back lowered almost flat. Amazingly, the rear seats can be moved backwards and forwards. Just when Ewan and Tom don't need them, this car has built-in Iso-Fix brackets for child seats. I found out by sheer trial-and-error how to adjust all the different front-seat settings, but was disappointed that these were manual rather than electric. One of our previous cars – the Audi AllRoad, I think – had electric adjustments and two memories, so we could each select our own pre-programmed seat position when we were driving.

I found out how to unlock the bonnet but not how to release it! That is for the next exploration.

Once the sun was down I locked Bailey in the house and watered all the outside plant containers.

Pat was really off-colour, so I did dinner: a ready-to-roast spiced spatchcocked chicken from the Co-op with buttered Jersey Royals, stringless green beans and petits pois, all very tasty.

### **Wednesday 16 May 2018**

I slept fairly well last night, apart from being wakened by something heavy falling off the window-sill just behind our pillows. A strong wind had blown the fanlight wide open and then the roller blind had swept one of Pat's jewelry boxes off the sill. We didn't bother to investigate and rolled over to try to get back to sleep.

I felt incredibly dopey at wake-up time but was dragged out of bed by my wretched bladder at 6:50. I considered getting back under the duvet but decided that would be stupid. My mouth was dry and I felt generally grotty, but a cup of tea and a walk with Bailey got me going, though as I write this at almost 9am I still feel rather droopy. In spite of sleeping better recently, I never feel really rested in the morning, so maybe I should have a word with the GP...?

The feet felt much better this morning than yesterday.

Bailey attempted to attack two separate cats during the walk, nearly pulling my permanently-painful right shoulder out-of-joint as he hit the limit

of the long lead. We met a beautiful big dog – very long and lean – which was being walked by the man who used to walk Heidi the Weimerana. This one looked much the same but was red-brown rather than mushroom grey in colour, so maybe they change colour as they age.

This morning was for pottering. I took a poo-bag and a carrier out to collect all the doggy-do's on the grass and around the garden. Three laps later there were plenty and my load was augmented with the remains of two dead birds – young blackbirds, I think – and a broken jar and the tea-light that had been in it. Once that lot was in the bin (after I had paused to bring the recycling bin in from the front gate and arranged the two wheelies so that the landfill bin would be ready for next Tuesday) I tackled what had been my stock of road grit, ready to tackle the heavy snow we never had. The plastic storage box I had used was full of rain water, which had dissolved the salt and left just the grit. I got a trug and managed to decant most of the water into loads I could carry to the drain, including the pickled frog which had been floating in the salty water for some time, and then fetched the bag-trolley from the garage. By standing the box on end and tilting it I managed to get the platform under it and wheel it down to the bottom of the garden, where I could empty it on the pile of assorted garden garbage. I left the box there to be hosed out next time I water the pots.

After coffee, I went through to empty the dishwasher but found that it had 50 minutes left on the clock. The next job, then, was a shower in preparation for my ophthalmology appointment at 3:20 this afternoon. We are really enjoying having our supply of hot water back after the recent boiler problem!

The hospital appointment was like no other ophthalmology visit I have ever had. I was expecting to spend about three hours having my dilating drops, sight test, retina scan and meeting with the doctor but, having arrived quite early, I was actually finished five minutes after my appointment time! The consultant I saw was very pleasant, reassured me my MRI scan had revealed nothing sinister and that there was nothing to worry me seriously apart from my blasted floaters. I have cataracts, but they are quite 'young' and are not interfering with my vision. He told me my runny eyes were actually 'dry eyes' and gave me a long-term prescription for some lubricant drops, which I collected from our local pharmacy as soon as we got home. They have a very odd method of getting them into my eyes, which might need a bit of practice

Dinner was cold leftover chicken and salad, with a bit of cold sticky-toffee pudding and cream for me (too sweet for Pat!).

The drops he had used to further dilate my eyes and highlight any lesions on the cornea left me highly sensitive to bright light right through the evening but I was able to enjoy two TV programmes – *Ambulance* and *24 Hours in A&E*, as if I hadn't seen enough of hospitals for the day!

### **Thursday 17 May 2018**

After one good night, last night was dreadful. I woke up at 3:15am (so at least I had had about four hours solid sleep) with terrible itching in both ankles, but mostly in the dry skin around the surgical scars on the right one – the one with 'catastrophic' failure of its implant. I basted them both

with itch-relieving cream and the itching calmed down, but I couldn't get back to sleep.

I had decided on an experiment to see if my unpleasant feeling before and during getting up are symptoms of dehydration: instead of taking just enough water to moisten my mouth after each pee I would drink at least a couple of glasses through the night. I didn't pee much more than I usually do and I felt a lot better than I do on most mornings, so that looks like a good result, but I felt that I had hardly slept after getting up. I decided to delay getting up by an hour to try catching up on the lost sleep, and in the end got up just before 8am.

It was a beautiful morning, though chilly at 9 degrees, and we had a normal walk which was somewhat disrupted by hordes on kids on little bikes, bigger bikes and scooters. We managed to avoid mishaps and finished the route in 22½ minutes, slow compared with the last three days. I had put Voltarol gel on the left ankle but both legs had felt rather stiff, probably explaining the slow time.

We went up to the next village where I dropped Pat at The Original Factory Shop while I visited the barber's shop. I was lucky enough to get straight in the chair. I went back to the shop where Pat was still happily browsing and we picked up quite a lot of useful stuff including a second pair of the HiTec walking shoes, which are the only shoes I feel comfortable in now, three all-cotton polo shirts and some new accessories for the garden hose because none of the old variable sprays' triggers spring back when released. When I tested the new one it worked beautifully.

We shared a pork pie for lunch. Then after lunch Pat got the big Sebo vac out, but I said I would do downstairs – hard work with a heavy machine on dense carpet pile. She decided to spring-clean the bathroom instead, so I did the kitchen, hall, front bedroom, conservatory and sitting-room.

Dinner was a salad of cold leftovers.

### **Friday 18 May 2018**

I had a decent night's sleep in spite of getting through two full glasses of water, and also in spite of the fact that the early-morning temperature had been forecast at 4 degrees and we had only the 4.5-tog summer duvet covering us. I was really comfortable as the clock passed 6am and felt a sore temptation to have another late start. It was a lovely morning, though, and I didn't want another encounter of the tinies-on-wheels.

So I got up at 7:10am. I had a sort of itchy soreness on the inside of my left ankle. I gave it a rub of Savlon cream – maybe not the most appropriate treatment, but it did feel more comfortable.

The temperature had crawled up to 7 degrees, so I put on a sweatshirt under my fleece. Both lower legs were aching and the soles of my feet felt a bit bruised after the week's walks, but we got round the route in 22 minutes 34 seconds – only five seconds longer than yesterday but much slower than Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday – meeting neither other dogs or children on or off wheels.

Pat went off on her first solo drive in the Merc after breakfast – another visit to The Original Factory Shop, as if yesterday's had not been long enough.

I have been scribbling the events for each day between now and the week when I have my second colonoscopy and my cardio appointment, but my handwriting really has gone to pot. So I just created a second worksheet on my Excel spreadsheet where I record our walks and got everything laid out neatly. This is now clipped to my other urgent medical and veterinary letters and documents and hung on the bottom of the study pinboard. The good news is that there is a lovely long gap between today and Wednesday 30 May, when I start the low-residue diet *with* Movicol, which looks like a weaker version of the KleanPrep purgative. The diet ends on Monday 4 June with the last meal at 4pm. Then the KleanPrep course starts and the Colonoscopy is on the following day. I have a cardio appointment the following Friday and then my diary is clear (so far!).

### **Monday 21 May 2018**

Nothing remarkable happened over the weekend – apart, of course, from the Royal Wedding! - except for Tom and Ewan being here from Friday evening to Saturday afternoon. Pat went out with them and Alistair on Saturday morning, and the Humax box recorded the whole day of BBC1 coverage. Once 'the three boys' had gone we settled down and watched the whole five hours.

I have mellowed greatly in my attitude to Royalty and the military. My old combination of socialism and pacifism is still there, but without the old edge of fanaticism, and I really enjoyed seeing one of lovely Diana's boys get married to someone pretty improbable – an actress and an American of mixed race. Good on you, Harry. The service (no – I am still a committed atheist!) was full of surprises, with a magnificent performance by the black head of the American Episcopalian church, whatever that is, and an unlikely performance of *Stand by me* (with no editing of the words) by a terrific gospel choir were the high spots for me. Pity Meaghan's Mum wouldn't walk her up the aisle, though, and that her Dad was prevented by health problems from experiencing the wedding.

I think it was Sunday morning when I simply couldn't start the car, no matter how many strange rituals I followed from the online Owner's Manual. It just would not fire up, so I looked through the mountain of paper I had accumulated during the purchase and tried various rescue numbers. Eventually I was told that, because the car had only been serviced by Mercedes garages I was entitled to use their rescue service. The guy who came, quite promptly, put the car's systems through a very thorough evaluation, and at the end the headline on his tablet's display said 'REPLACE BATTERY' in big, bold, black. I reported this back to my pet salesman at Evans Halshaw and he suggested I bring it in at 8:30 this morning (Monday) to see if they could replicate the findings.

I got up at 6am after lying awake almost all the time since 3am, not worrying desperately but just thinking incessantly about the bloody machine. I walked the dog, had breakfast, emptied the car of all my loose bits and pieces and even risked starting it, which happened perfectly. It started again when it was time to go, but somehow I managed to stall the engine as I crept across the pavement. This time it absolutely *wouldn't*

start, and I was concerned that hundreds of primary-school children have to walk along our bit of pavements. The only thing I could think of to do was to give it a push back onto our driveway, but I underestimated the gradient *and* the massive weight of our Teutonic Tank. I ran alongside it and tried to grab the door mirror, but the car evaded me and slammed backwards into the wall below our sitting-room bow window. I tried starting it again, without success, but did manage to push it free of the badly battered wall so I could assess the damage. To my amazement, the car had hardly sustained any at all apart from a broken rearlight lens, but the stone mosaic on our wall, and the brickwork behind it, were in a terrible mess.

I rang to report this to Evans Halshaw and they dispatched two of their men, who had a good fiddle with the car's settings, eventually got it going and took it back with an escort. By 2pm I was getting concerned about lack of feedback, but I got an email saying that they had agreed to replace the battery. Later, they said they wanted to test this thoroughly, even keeping the car until morning to make sure everything was okay when cold. The car would be road-tested and brought back tomorrow morning.

The next task was to find a builder to quote for an insurance claim (home, motor or both?). The web was totally unhelpful – all the 'approved people' sites, some of which I had used successfully before, were so badly engineered that I couldn't use them – for instance, drop-down option menus that didn't drop down! Luckily I had kept a builder, Mick, who had done some joinery for an insurance claim a few years ago in my phone contacts, and he turned up cheerfully at around 5:30pm. He even had a friend who could sort out the minor damage to the UPVC window and with whom he would do a joint quote.

I managed to relax more than I expected through the evening – I think my worrying organs had finally run out of fuel! - and slept well with only one loo visit before 6am.

### **Tuesday 22 May 2018**

I got up at 7am, feeling a bit dry but okay otherwise, and walked the dog. After breakfast I drove up to the Co-op with the car feeling fine. I hadn't realised how badly broken the right rear-light lens was and also discovered a big, deep dent between the number-plate and the light cluster. For some reason which, for the life of me, I cannot recall, I rang the Evans and Halshaw service department and they referred me to a good body repair guy in town. I went to see him, but he advised me to go straight to my insurers because they would use one of their approved repairers and provide us with a hire car. No contest!

I spent quite a long time talking to a charming and helpful young woman at Aviva. She booked the car in with a repairer in Lincoln and booked us a hire car from Enterprise, who collected me to take me to their office in town and sign everything up. I was given a Renault Captur – apparently just a hatchback, but seeming very big. It drove well and I even took a roundabout route home to enjoy it.

### **Wednesday 23 May 2018**

I got off to sleep easily enough but once I had got up at just after 5am for a pee I went off into another bout of worrying. I sang my favourite three old English folk songs in my head and counted backwards from 200 but did nothing but doze. I got up for another pee at 6:55 and decided not to go back to bed for the 20 minutes I had promised myself. My left foot was very painful, so I basted it liberally with Voltarol gel before putting my walking shoes on. The pain did ease while listening to the 7:30 news summary and, to my amazement, I didn't need to abort and turn back. I managed to get us round the usual walk in under 22 minutes. It was a dull morning with a temperature of 11 degrees, which made for comfortable walking (half the route runs due west to east, which makes low early-morning sun quite difficult. Within a very short time after getting home, both feet were aching badly. I took two Paracetamol and one Naproxen with my second cup of tea.

The truck arrived at about 11am to take the Merc to the Lincoln body-repairers.

Pat was getting very agitated about Anton. She spent ages writing an email to our contact at Executor Services which disappeared mysteriously when I was about to read it Heaven knows what the PC did – I spent quite a while trying to recover the text without success. To calm Pat down I suggested we pay a surprise visit to Anton, so we jumped in the Captur and drove over. We stopped off at a new Co-op on the way and got him some milk and food.

He didn't answer the doorbell, which flashes his lights, so Pat used her key to get us in. The house was insanely hot – even more so than usual – and he was fast asleep in his chair. He was wearing a sweater which lived up to its name as his head was beaded with sweat. She nudged him gently awake, which really startled him, but he was in an unusually good mood. We managed to get him to the bank for some cash, which had been very difficult lately, so our visit was really worthwhile.

Builder Mick replied to a text I had sent him earlier asking if he was going to quote for repairing the damage under the bay window. He assured me he was and said he would bring the quote tomorrow morning, which will allow me to get the insurance claim under way.

I had another look for black bin liners and found an almost-empty roll of very flimsy ones. I gaffer-taped two onto the window-sill and the broken stone=work to stop any rain-water getting inside the structure through the cracks and fractures.

### **Thursday 24 May 2018**

In spite of everything, I had a fairly good night with just two visits to the loo, getting back to sleep quite quickly both times, and decided to get up at 7 o'clock. I felt pretty grotty before and after rising – dry mouth and just generally under the weather. I am beginning to suspect that my wonderful goose-down pillows might have something unhealthy in them, and I think I had better get some super-quality polyester ones to try.

It was a dull, grey morning with a temperature of 9 degrees, dry with a brisk chilly breeze. We had a birthday card to post to our friend Annick in Normandy, so we took a roundabout route at a decent pace, along the

edge of the football field, which was deserted apart from one little dog and owner – no psycho Stanley!. We clocked 24 minutes 18 seconds.

By 9am there was no quote from Mick, so I decided I had better get the insurance claim going. This involved a long, pleasant talk with a friendly, sympathetic lady in Glasgow, with everything done by about 9:45. I will get a call from an associate company within 48 hours to come and inspect the damage. I asked if Direct Line had lists of approved contractors, in case Mick disappears into the mist, as so many local businesses seem to do, but didn't quite understand what she said.

Pat has an appointment with the diabetes photo clinic this morning.

I ordered a pair of top-of-the-range pillows from Amazon as soon as I had written the last bit. They should be here tomorrow. I hope they work miracles with my sleep because all the current problems are really wearing me down.

We got her to the diabetic photo centre on time and she emerged almost blind because the dilating drops used for the pictures are much stronger than those I get in the Ophthalmology clinic. We returned a game which Alistair had borrowed from the Laser Labyrinth war games centre and then went to Morrisons for a few odds and ends. We spent over £70.

I got a call from one of the insurance company's agents to say he would come and inspect the damage to the house wall and window tomorrow morning.

After lunch, I set about installing the brass wire mail basket on the inside of our front door. First, I had to remove the wind flap, which is attached with four really tiny Philips screws and then make a paper template so that I could fit the basket precisely around the flap's position. The big problem is that there was bright daylight outside the glazing on the dark UPVC door, so it was almost impossible to see what I was doing. I managed by making a paper template to place the new screw holes, but I didn't think to put the flap back on before I screwed the basket on. That meant I had to position and drive all its screws from inside the basket. I was almost ready to give up when the last screw was driven, and we were concerned that the deep basket stopped the door opening as wide as we would like. I think we may have to let large people in through the back door.

We had bought some ready-made curries, rice and naans from Morrisons, so there wasn't much cooking to do tonight.

### **Friday 25 May 2018**

I got up at 7am as usual. It was a dull, drizzly morning, but the forecast heavy rain didn't seem to have arrived throughout the night. Bailey and I managed to usual route without getting too wet in an estimated 22 minutes (I forgot to stop the stopwatch at the gate!). He needs a light rub over with his towel, but my fleece jacket and hair weren't wet enough to warrant attention.

We had a brief visit from someone representing the house insurance company who will report his independent assessment of the damage. I phoned a builder called Mark whose card I was given yesterday by Gary the man from Rington's tea.

The letter basket had its first delivery this morning. This happened to be a heavy load including one of Pat's glossy magazines and several small packets, which the postman insisted on shoving through in one wad. This did stop the mail reaching the floor but everything got pretty screwed up and a nice little dent was developing in the dado rail, so we had a go at finding a pet gate. In the end we settled for one from Argos, which is now at the back of our local Sainsbury's. By the time I had entered my product code on one of the terminals and walked to the counter the gate had arrived. A quick credit card job and I was on my way.

The bits looked pretty robust, but there were no real instructions (the Chinese really do need to get to grips with this side of their excellent products!) so I had to work out for myself what all the bits did when fitted together. I needed to cut and smooth a block of MDF to get the top hinge as far from the wall as the bottom one will be on the skirting board. I painted this with the emulsion I had used on the Anaglypta between the dado and the skirting to camouflage it. By the time I had done this I was in no mood to do any more, but I had figured out how the thing would go together (I hoped). Tomorrow is another day, but I just hope the wall will be robust enough to take plugs and screws for my little MDF spacer. The gate hinges will then screw into that and the skirting board. Later it occurred to me that I might need an identical spacer on the opposite wall!

As Pat has not yet driven the Captur courtesy car, and has been having quite serious problems with her blood glucose level bouncing up and down, I will be taking her to Sheffield to meet Alistair and the boys at the climbing wall. This will be Ewan's birthday treat, which is the reason for Pat going over with presents. Worryingly, the wall is in a neighbourhood where there was a fatal stabbing just yesterday.

### **Monday 28 May 2018**

It was fascinating watching Ewan and Tom, along with quite a few other kids, free-climbing on various walls with differently coloured holds.

Back home I had the Monaco GP qualifying to watch. The ever-smilin Ricciardo won pole position, and for me if Lewis couldn't to it this was the second-best outcome. Channel 4 seem to be dragging their programmes out to be longer and longer.

We had a nice salad for dinner, but were deprived of the expected episode of *Inspector Montalbano* because TV was swamped with coverage of various pop festivals. Pat wanted to watch a set by Ed Sheeran, which I found pleasant but uninspiring. Give me to Stones, Bowie and my other favourites every time!

Sunday was complicated. I read on the web that Wickes would be opening at 7:30am, so I went down for some all-purpose compost. There wasn't a soul in sight so I came straight home. Just after 10am I went back and bought four bags, having first lowered the rear seats and lined the floor with a clean(ish) tarpaulin. Then I did a modest shop at Sainsbury's, forgetting the Sunday paper which was one of the early-morning targets and diverting to the local OneStop to get it. Then came the Grand Prix, which wasn't exciting but had plenty of suspense, as Ricciardo's hybrid electrics broke but he managed to hold onto his lead.



Another salad, similar to Saturday's, finished the weekend off.

This morning I was enjoying the end of a good night's sleep but got up easily at 7am for a walk round our deserted village. The left foot was quite painful, but Bailey and I managed to get round the circuit in 22 minutes 27 seconds in dull, rather humid weather.

We had to do the Monday run to Anton's in spite of it being a Bank Holiday, because Pat needed to get everything loose out of his bathroom ready for the people installing his supposedly disable-friendly one on Thursday. Being Pat, of course, she insisted on cleaning it, which took her over an hour and left her exhausted and desperate for a shower.

I cooked a dinner of roast shoulder of lamb with Jersey Royals and asparagus, followed by Jamaica Ginger Cake with ice cream.

## **Tuesday 29 May 2018**

I woke up for the loo at around 5am and (I think) got back to sleep but was awake before 6am and had a worry session about the lack of builders to repair the front of the house. Mick, the guy I contacted a week or so ago and who promised me an estimate several days ago seemed to have vanished off the face of the Earth. I texted him this morning and actually got a reply saying he had forgotten my surname! Fingers crossed but Mark Mason, the builder recommended by Gary the Rington's Tea man is due here at around 10am tomorrow. Then there was the problem of the dog gate to worry about...

I got up at 7am to a dull morning with a temperature of about 12 degrees. My feet were aching, but I managed to get round the walk in about the same time as yesterday.

## **Thursday 31 May 2018**

Things have been pretty chaotic this week, which is why I haven't got round to updating the diary. The letter basket turned out to be too deep for the front door opening into our narrow hall. It was hitting the dado rail every time and had started digging a dent in the wood. It was also limiting the opening of the door, making taking delivery of large parcels very difficult. The worst was a 5x3 case of red wines from *The Sunday Times Wine Club* (actually 14 bottles because one slot was taken up by two beautiful Dartington Crystal wine tumblers).

This conclusion led us to start researching pet gates on the Web – a chaotic market with very frustrating information. I ended up buying a robust iron gate from Argos for £25. It was supposed to be adjustable, with two sections held together by two plastic clamps, so I went ahead with cutting and painting a packing piece of MDF so that the top hinge and the bottom one which was fastened to the skirting would be correctly aligned. So far, so good – until I discovered that the width was only adjustable in steps of about three inches, the spacing of the vertical bars. First I set it too wide and it hit the wall when I attempted to close it. I reduced the width and it passed a fraction under three inches short of the wall. The options were to put hefty chunks of wood on the wall to take the fittings or to take it back to Argos and hope I would be able to get a refund. I went for option two, and the Argos computer system managed to find my transaction without the receipt, which I must have shredded. I got

a full refund. We visited two big pet shops in town yesterday but neither had any gates, leaving us back where we started.

We used the shopping trip to give Pat her first go at driving the courtesy car, which she managed well. She has always been a good driver, but the stupid computer functions in these modern cars are quite intimidating. Having driven the car for a couple of weeks I think it's crap.

Three sweaty, uncomfortable days' work totally wasted. I feel quite exhausted and very frustrated this morning.

Pat had to be at Anton's for 9am to let the bathroom fitters in, and took the Renault rather nervously (I did offer to drop and collect her but she insisted on driving herself). I gave her a Post-it reminding her how to restart the engine by depressing the clutch pedal when it decided to stop itself. About 90 minutes later I haven't heard from her so I assume all is well.

I had got up at 6:45 with my legs and feet feeling quite painful, and when I stood up the left ankle was very sore indeed. There were a card and a letter awaiting posting, so I took them and Bailey up to the nearest post box, a shorter route than the usual one but it still took just over 21 minutes of slow, awkward walking. We had breakfast together before Pat left.

I had to cancel Bailey's vet appointment tomorrow temporarily as Enterprise don't allow pets in their cars.

My breakfast was cornflakes with milk and white sugar, as this is Day 2 of my low-residue diet (I discovered that fish and chips were OK last night, but without mushy peas or ketchup). I will be having an omelette tonight.

I have had three of the ten sachets of Movicol dissolved in water and this morning's visit to the loo looked as if it was working. This aims to soften and eject as much residue as possible before the dreaded KleanPrep takes over on Monday – yuk!

Just as I wrote that, I got the following reply to a text I sent Pat about 40 minutes ago ending in 'All quiet so guess all's well...?':

'No chance! They were here at 8. Anton was in bedroom getting up. He is not a happy chap. They will be here until 4. Anton wants me to stay!'

She phoned a bit later, really annoyed about how much Executor Services and the care agency are piling on her. She was actually thinking she would have to go on paying Anton's bills after they had taken over the management of his finances, but I tried to reassure her that Dan would be putting them on Direct Debit. She is going to have to stay but a carer is coming around lunchtime and she is hoping to escape then.

## **Tuesday 5 June 2018**

I have just removed the link to this diary from the home page of my website [www.paul-marsden.co.uk](http://www.paul-marsden.co.uk). I am concerned that it is saying a lot about all sorts of family stuff which I don't really want to be public, and very little about my bones. If you are a regular user, the diary is still on the site but you need to know the address.

I also want to take some of the pressure of constant updating off my shoulders.

In a short while we will be leaving for Doncaster for my second colonoscopy, provided the KleanPrep wears off so that I can escape from the loo! I was in there at 4:30 this morning and again at around 7:00 as last night's doses continued to do their work rather than wear off.

We got to the hospital rather early, so we had a long wait, but when I went into the operating theatre(?) I met three female and one older male team members. The boss was one of the ladies. They were all very friendly and reassuring and the examination went smoothly. A couple of polyps were lassoed and cut out, a process which I saw far more clearly than I did before. I got quite a lot of pain from having the bowel inflated with CO2 but the gas and air eased most of it.

I felt fine once I had had my cuppa and biscuits and been declared fit to leave, and as before I was happy to drive us home in the Captur.

We had an all-day breakfast, washed down in my case by a modest glass of Toro Loco.

My feet were very stiff and painful through the evening, particularly when getting up after a long sit-down. I really struggled to get walking.

### **Thursday 7 June 2018**

Much of yesterday was taken up with the installation of the second dog gate, which looked like being a lot less challenging than the previous one, but in fact needed quite a bit of problem-solving and improvisation. By the end of the day I had the hinged screwed to the wall and the gate hung and levelled, but I suspect that the two latching fitting on the opposite wall will present further difficulties. I will probably need to cut a bit out of the dado rail to accommodate the latch, and I am now regretting my generosity in giving my Dad's beautiful set of wood chisels to Alistair!

We actually managed to fit a visit to the cinema into the schedule yesterday afternoon – a light-hearted and rather vulgar (in a nice way) US comedy featuring four of Hollywood's older ladies called *Book Club*. The light relief was very welcome, though I got very stiff from sitting and struggled to get down the steps from our seats and out to the car park.

The feet were just as painful when I got up for the loo in the small hours. I had quite a difficult walk to the en-suite on the thick, squashy carpet. When I got back into bed I gave each foot a good basting with Ibuprofen gel, which eased the immediate pain and when I got up at 7am they were working quite normally.

I think the stiffness and pain are due to hours spent grovelling around to install the gate, and I have some more of that coming today!

Reassuringly, after being poked and prodded my colon produced a pretty normal result when I went to the loo this morning.

We managed the walk in a fairly typical time.

The rest of the morning was dedicated to improvisation and problem-solving to get the new dog gate, already hanging on its hinges, closable. Because I had needed to cheat in various ways with the hinges to fit it between the skirting and the bloody dado, I had to cheat some more with the two latching bits at the other end. I got there eventually, but it was

quite difficult to latch or unlatch the thing without lifting the gate off the hinges – difficult, but not impossible.

After lunch and a shower I did quite a big Sainsbury's shop (a large trolley and a bill over £100!), mostly for food to last us the next week. Pat wanted to try a recipe with pea shoots but they had sold out.

Aches and pains in my legs and feet from the morning's work made the shopping very heavy going, but I managed.

We had a kiddies' supper of fish fingers with Jersey Royals and mushy peas followed by fresh fruit – a small, hard and fibrous, but very sweet, Braeburn apple for me (we had watched a documentary about carbohydrates and fibre the previous evening – really scary!).

### **Friday 8 June 2018**

When I work up I seemed to recall basting my left foot with Ibuprofen gel in the small hours, but walking was still pretty hard after the week's exertions. We managed a walk but I chose to turn back at the 10-minute mark and it still took us 21¼ minutes to complete the route. I was really relieved to get back home.

For some reason I had been summoned to the Cardio clinic, with an appointment at 11am today. I haven't had any of the symptoms that caused me to ask for the original examinations, so maybe this was just for the docs to tell me I'm fine!

I left with plenty of time in hand, parked in the big outpatients car-park (where the ticket system, which has been out-of-order for months, had finally been repaired) and walked to the main entrance and on to the Cardio-Respiratory Department, only to be told that I should have gone to the main outpatients reception, which was near the car-park but a long way from Cardio. I should have read my letter! I turned round and made it to outpatients with five minutes to spare. A nurse weighed me and took my blood-pressure, which was a bit higher than it had been in Doncaster, probably because of the long, fast walks I had just done! A few minutes later the consultant himself called me in, asked me a few questions and was obviously happy with all my results, because he passed my case back to the GPs and sent me on my way.

We had an amusing episode this afternoon. I needed to pick up my prescriptions and coleslaw for dinner (see below), and Pat asked me to post an envelope of mail for Alistair. I got to the gate to find a corgi looking in. He wasn't on a lead and I couldn't see anyone with him, so I opened the gate and invited him in. He was very relaxed and friendly, and in superb condition, so I took him to the front door and announced his arrival to Pat. Bailey went berserk, trying to squeeze under his gate, which managed to restrain him with a little help from Pat. She got Bailey's spare collar and his lead from the kitchen, and the visitor was quite happy to have the lead adjusted and put on. He was almost certainly one of the 'terrible two' who make such a racket when we walk by, so I headed in that direction. A neighbour told me 'everybody' was looking for a lost corgi, and a few minutes later a car pulled into the drive with a very relieved looking driver! I handed Einstein, as he was called, back to his owner, and got back on-task with a few hundred unexpected metres added to my errand.

I walked up to the Post Office, passing the shops, and then back to collect my shopping (two bags of sweets were added to the coleslaw) and prescriptions. I was home in time to watch the start of the Paris semi between Rafa and one of our favourites, Juan-Martin del Potro – or Ee-Yore as we call him affectionately. He put up a good fight, but Rafa on the Paris clay was too much for him.

I haven't mentioned my eyes much in this diary, but they really have been worrying me over the past couple of days. My vision is mildly blurred but the shadowy floaters really are impairing my vision. My *Outlook* diary says I have an appointment with Mr Dinakaran on the 3 October at 14:20, but I can't find the letter which I must have had a while ago.

On the understanding that I wouldn't get into a boring groove of cooking chicken wings and potato wedges every Friday, Pat OK'd them for dinner this evening and we both enjoyed them thoroughly, as we did our Aldi not-quite-Magnum choc-ices. I have no idea what we will have next Friday, though...

We were worried because Bailey was coughing a lot through the evening, but he managed to wolf a whole bowl of his dry food before bed, having eaten a whole tin of meaty food at dinner time.

### **Saturday 9 June 2018**

I was looking forward to a lie-in this morning and managed to stay in bed until about 8 o'clock, but worries about getting repairers for the damage the Merc and I did to the house. I was also concerned about Bailey's coughing, and was having horrible visions of finding him dead. I was massively relieved when I heard his usual reaction to me moving about: a violent shake with much ear-flapping and rattling of his ID medal. A peek through our bedroom door revealed a vigorously wagging tail, so all was well, though it didn't help with the insurance claim.

I paid yet another visit to Sainsbury's, but a very brief one, after breakfast and they had replenished their stock of pea shoots. I bought two packets as well as two litre-bottles of extra-virgin olive oil as they were on offer and six boxes of Ricola sugar-free elderflower-flavoured sweets, which we both really like.

We got settled in time for the French Open ladies' final and enjoyed seeing Simona Halep beating the American Sloane Stephens. We are looking forward to the men's match tomorrow.

My feet and ankles were feeling fairly comfortable through the day, which made a change. I hope I can manage another fairly restful day before the week's exertions get the pain started again.

### **Monday 11 June 2018**

We had a visit from Alistair and Heather yesterday, which rather disrupted the tennis-watching. It was even more disrupted when I discovered that the Humax FreeSat box had failed to record the Men's Final. We joined it quite late in the match, but to judge from the scoreline I didn't think we had missed too much – it was a very one-sided contest with Rafa at nearly his best, only hampered by an attack of cramp in his racket arm late on.

I was wide awake before 5am this morning and got off into my usual bout of worrying – about the car hopefully coming home today or tomorrow

(see below) and the failure of our local builder to get a quote from his window guy. I decided to stop trying to sleep and to look for other local firms on my phone. I found one that did both building and windows and looked promising, and I will be ringing them after breakfast. I gave up on sleep and tried reading article's from yesterday's *Observer* on the Kindle while lying flat on my back. This worked pretty well, with my eyelids getting heavy pretty soon. I will try this as soon as I have trouble getting off to – or back to – sleep in future.

It was a beautiful sunny morning. My feet felt weary for some reason, but we managed to get round the route in 21½ minutes.

I did a bit of research and phoned a couple of local building firms because Mick and his window man seem to have disappeared into the wilderness. Nobody self-employed seems to want work these days.

Pat needed to do another bank visit with Anton to pay bills - hopefully the last now that Executor Services have a reasonable grip on things – so I chauffeured her over. He was in a much better mood than last Monday's and actually signed a couple of documents and agreed to do the bank bit. As usual, the parking nearby was a nightmare, only survivable with Anton's Blue Badge, so they had a long walk back to the car when they were finished. This was particularly unfortunate because Pat's back had gone into spasm overnight and she was in a lot of pain, and still is as I write this..

On the way back I had a call from the car repair company to tell me the work on the Merc would be delayed because someone had not been happy with a colour match! This annoyed both of us, but I was feeling philosophical and left the anger to Pat. They will ring tomorrow with an update...

Once back I scanned a bunch of Anton's documents and emailed the PDFs to Dan at Executor Services, but an auto-reply came back to tell me he is on annual leave, ambiguously either until the 8 May or from the 8 May. We can handle this, because we seem to be getting things under control.

We didn't get calls from either of the building firms. What is the matter with these people?

I gave the containers in the garden a good hosing before preparing dinner.

Pat's back was very bad after we got back, so we decided to keep dinner simple: no roast pork with apple sauce and stuffing (though I did find a box of sage-and-onion stuffing and another of cooked Bramley apples – one in the inside freezer and the other in the garage one). Pork tomorrow then but *linguine al pesto* tonight: red pesto for Pat and green for me, with masses of grated Parmesan and Pecorino.

## **Tuesday 12 June 2018**

I slept fairly well last night but went off into my usual worry-fest for the hour or so until I got up at 6:50.

There was a letter to British Gas, officially from Anton and actually signed by him yesterday, which needed posting. That gave me an excuse for cutting the walk a little short, but it ended taking up just 20½ minutes with my left foot feeling quite painful.

The car will have been in Lincoln for three weeks if it is still there tomorrow. This is really ridiculous and I think I will suggest to Aviva that they give Brooklands a serious warning.

I decided I had better talk to Direct Line, too, because our local builders all appear to be useless. Surely the insurance company had access to contractors...?

It turned out that they did, and after listening to my frustration our contact at Direct Line appointed an approved company to do the masonry and the window frame. They phoned later and we made an appointment for their surveyor to visit on Thursday morning.

Ironically, at about 1pm, the window man associated with Mark, the guy I contacted via Gary from Ringtons, turned up out of nowhere. I had to tell him that my insurers had appointed their own contractor and suggested Mark should move a little more quickly!

So, with a little luck the front of the house will be mended fairly soon and the car will be back even sooner – or am I being wildly optimistic?

I got the Atco Admiral out and started mowing the lawn, but was concerned when the engine cut out. I re-primed the carburettor and after some vigorous tugs on the cord she started up and was soon running normally. I finished the mow but put off trimming the edges until tomorrow.

Pat's back is still very bad, so I am doing the Sunday roast, aided by a bottle of Cabalié. The pork shoulder from Redwood Farm, bought at Retford Farmers' Market, cooked beautifully. I gave it half an hour at 230degC followed by an hour at 170, and the roasting thermometer hit the target temperature for pork dead on-time. The meat was tender and succulent and the crackling was the best I have ever managed to produce. I managed to rejuvenate the sage-and-onion stuffing and the Bramley apple sauce which I had dug out of the freezers, and the roasties were good too. In spite of her pain Pat enjoyed the meal as much as I did. I have lost my confidence in the kitchen to some extent lately, so this was very gratifying. For dessert we had vanilla ice-cream with some more apple sauce.

Pat struggled through the evening, having taken a Tramadol tablet with two Paracetamols, which was quite desperate because Tramadol is a strong opioid.

### **Wednesday 13 June 2018**

I slept very well and – thanks to yesterday's efforts with the car situation – didn't have a long worry session before getting up. In fact, getting up just after 7am was pretty difficult. Pat stirred as I was getting dressed and looked to be having great difficulty moving. She said she had taken Paracetamol and Tramadol at 4am, so I told her not to take any more until noon, equivalent to three doses a day. She was enthusiastic when I asked if she wanted a cup of tea, so I took one up as soon as I had made a pot.

My feet and legs were pretty uncomfortable after dragging the mower around the lawn yesterday, but it was a very nice morning, so I decided to try a walk. I turned us round at the ten-minute mark and was relieved to get home in a total time of 21 minutes.

Pat managed to get herself downstairs at around 9am, walking very cautiously, and was able to enjoy her breakfast.

Later on I searched my *Outlook* inbox for anything from Aviva, our car insurer, to give me a contact. I found an email eventually (searching isn't as easy in the new version of the software as it was in the old one) and replied to it, expressing our disappointment that the car still wasn't back from the body repairers, but the email address I had found got me an auto-reply saying the owner was out of the office (but not for how long) and her email would not be monitored – pretty poor, I thought, but our disappointment had gone on record. Just after midday I had a reply telling me that the Aviva representative had spoken to the repairers, who promised that the job would be finished by the end of the week. Whether that means that the car will be home by then remains to be seen...

Pat decided to go back to bed after lunch as her back would be more comfortable there than on the settee. I took her a cup of tea and a gigger biscuit and found her drowsy and fairly relaxed.

Towards the end of the afternoon I checked the weather forecast, which was threatening gales tomorrow (wind speeds topping 43mph), so I went out and folded our cantilever parasol, took it down, put it in its cover and stashed it safely in the conservatory. I also took the opportunity to grease the inside of the main tube with Vaseline as a little rust was already beginning to show.

Dinner tonight was cold pork, stuffing and apple sauce with reheated roasties and gravy. I hoped the pork would be as tasty as it was last night, and it was very good eaten cold.

#### **Thursday 14 June 2018**

My mobile rang quietly at about 7am this morning. Luckily I was awake, but I must stop turning the ringer volume down quite so far at bedtime. It was the surveyor from NEWAYS, Direct Line's contractor, who told me he would be with us by 7:30 (the original message had said between 8am and midday). That resolved my dilemma about walking the dog before breakfast.

Pat's back pain was horrendously bad when she tried to move and completely failed. I took her some tea and high-powered medication, and she managed after a long time to roll onto her back and use the power adjustment to raise the head of the bed. This in turn enabled her to drink the tea and take the pills.

The surveyor turned up bang on time and told me that they would replace the entire window as the frame could be distorted enough to prevent it being locked securely. He didn't expect any problems with the decorative masonry. It was obviously in his company's interest to do as thorough (and expensive) a job as possible at Direct Line's expense!

Pat eventually got herself downstairs and managed to eat a normal breakfast, and by 11am – time for coffee – she seemed fairly comfortable and was talking about trying to sleep sitting up.

Later on I got a call from the car repairers to say the Merc was nearly ready to be returned to us. We should have it for the weekend. So good news all the way!



We watched quite a lot of the Grenfell Tower anniversary stuff, which was poignant for me because Kensington was my boyhood territory.

Feeling elated, I bought a secondhand Mercedes B Class owner's manual, with wallet, on Ebay for about thirty quid. Things were going well today so hang the expense.

Neither of us was very bothered about lunch, so we each had a cup of tea and three slices of Warburtons' tasty fruit loaf toasted and spread with butter and golden syrup.

Afterwards, in spite of the tail end of Storm Hector, I cut two plastic rubble sacks open and gaffer-taped them to the outside window-sill and the stonework. We have rain forecast from the small hours of Saturday morning until lunchtime and we don't want too much water getting into the broken masonry.

Just when I was getting *really* frustrated with waiting for the car, I got an email from Aviva headed 'YOUR VEHICLE IS ALMOST READY' followed by 'Great news! Your repairs are almost finished. Your local repair centre will be in touch soon to make arrangements for getting your Mercedes B 180 CDI back to you.' To which my immediate response was 'About bloody time!'. I can't wait to get the Merc safely parked on our forecourt and the Captur, which I backed down to the garage door in preparation earlier, returned to Enterprise (which will cost me a full tank of diesel).

To my disgust, a phone-call from the repairers at 5:30pm burst the bubble. I was told that they couldn't deliver the car tomorrow because the truck's list was full, so delivery would be on Monday. I got quite aggressive with the silly young woman who called and wrote a really strong email to my contact Veronica at Aviva:

*I had an email from Aviva sent at 2:30pm saying all the work is finished and the repairer would be in touch to arrange delivery. Just before 5:30pm, I had a call from Brooklands saying that they cannot deliver today and their truck is solidly booked tomorrow, so the car cannot be returned until Monday – not even Saturday! I was rather rude to the young woman who phoned and told her that she should tell her boss just how furious I am. She replied 'OK – that's fine'.*

*As it is probably the end of your working day you probably won't see this until tomorrow. We are going to have a problem with delivery on Monday because we have an important commitment to a severely disabled relative, so we may be away from home when Brooklands want to deliver our car.*

*We are both very angry and disappointed indeed, having hoped that you would pass on our disappointment to Brooklands this week and this might get them off their backsides. They have now had our car for three weeks and two days, which is absurd for a relatively small body repair. It reflects badly on Aviva that you have contractor who provides such terrible service.*

Pat was still suffering badly by bedtime but she managed to get into bed.

I had real trouble getting to sleep because I wanted to hit out at someone, and ended up reading *Observer* political articles on my illuminated Kindle between 3am and 4am, and even after that I lay awake for a long time.

**Friday 15 June 2018**

I was awake early, but feeling really tired, and was tempted to stay in bed, but habit took control and I got up at 7:10am. We had a large envelope of Anton-related documents that needed posting so I took the longer route via the postbox near the football pitch. The field was completely empty, so I told Bailey we should try walking that way again. The walk took about 25 minutes and my feet were very painful indeed by the time we got home.

There was no email from Veronica at 8:30.

The good news was that I could hear the upstairs shower waste pump at 8:30, which meant that Pat had managed to get up and into the cubicle.

We are expecting Alistair and the boys this evening, though as he is now working until 6pm and it is a long drive to Buxton from Dewsbury and another long drive to us – total probably three hours. We will see...

I had a call at about 9:30am from Brooklands to say that they had arranged with a firm called John Fotheringhams to deliver the car here this afternoon. I have no idea whether this is the result of my rather aggressive attitude on the phone yesterday or whether Veronica and Aviva had had a hand in things, but of course I agreed to this (as if I might not!) and was happy to pay them my £350 excess with my Visa credit card over the phone.

I didn't hear anything back from Veronica after the emails I sent her yesterday afternoon and this morning.

So it looks as if the train is finally back on the rails. Once the Merc is safely in our forecourt, I just have to arrange to get the Captur back to Enterprise. I could just take it to their premises opposite Aldi and ask them to drive me home but I would rather get the plan sorted before acting.

I am really looking forward to sitting in the Merc with the Owner's Handbook when it arrives next week and learning what all the controls do and how to use them. Having moaned like crazy about the Captur's habit of turning off the engine at every traffic light, I will probably enable this in the Merc!

John Fotheringham arrived fairly early in the afternoon and I soon had the Merc, with no trace whatever of the damage and repair, comfortably parked in our forecourt. He was a big, jovial fellow and we shared a little friendly badinage before he drove his truck away, leaving the car parked at the kerb on our side of the road.

That is not a good position from which to drive into the forecourt in a car that is a fairly tight fit in the gateway, so I drove it up to our local shopping precinct, turned round and turned into our gate from the opposite side. The car felt good and was immaculately clean inside and out.

A little later I was driving again, this time to the Co-op for some basic shopping. I felt as if a weight had been taken off my shoulders. I might be wrong but all the aggravations now seemed to have evaporated. All I need now is the Owner's Handbook, which should be here sometime next week.

I spent quite a while trying to print a Father's Day card for the boys to give to their Dad. But everything seemed to go wrong. In the end I had to

improvise because the bloody HP printer had run out of cyan ink, leaving all the pictures with a lurid yellow tinge! I stuck the good pictures to the folded A4 card and Pat set about writing the messages.

I returned the Renault to Enterprise after filling it with rather a lot of diesel and getting a life home from one of the staff.

### **Monday 18 June 2018**

There was nothing special to report about the weekend. As always, it was a pleasure to have Ewan and Tom here from Friday evening until Saturday afternoon, and everything feel a bit flat when Alistair took them home.

We were talking with Alistair about the benefits of dry fryers, and after doing some research on Sunday I ordered one from Argos and went down to collect it from their shop inside Sainsbury's – a really enjoyable drive on pretty clear roads in the Merc.

I bought some Maris Piper potatoes and weighed out 1.5kg to make a batch of chips and prepared the left-over chicken wings to go with them. The chips seemed to take ages to brown, but were quite acceptable, if a little dry inside. I decided I would try cutting the chips a little thinner next time, which would be with a roasted gammon joint tonight.

This was a fairly normal Monday with the routine visit to Anton, with me driving (very happily!) because Pat's back still hasn't really settled down. There were no bills to pay but Pat managed to get some money out of the ATM at the Co-op in Renishaw, to pay for the food we bought for Anton and to give him some pocket money. The visit was fairly short, getting us home in time to watch the beginning of the tennis championship at Queens. The new lad from Derby, Jay Clarke, did well against the absurdly tall Sam Querrey, though Querrey's reach and experience prevailed in the end. Later we watched England's first World Cup match, which was pretty boring for the most part.

I made thinner chips – French fries, really, to go with gammon and an egg for tonight's dinner. These came out better than last night's thicker ones. I'll try a different breed of spud for the next lot. The gammon was disappointing: we have had similar joints from the Co-op before, but this one looked more like a jammed together mass of scraps.

### **Tuesday 19 June 2018**

I got up at 7am on a beautiful sunny morning and came down to Bailey lying flat on his back with his legs in the air and his tail wagging busily – a great way to start the day. I quick look out of the window reassured me that we really had got our Mercedes back. The week's obligation to Anton had been fulfilled and all was well. I just hoped Pat's back would have improved overnight.

My feet were far from pain-free but felt a lot better than they did yesterday. We had a pleasant walk and finished the course in 21 minutes 41 seconds.

I spent most of the morning trying to get my web and mobile banking working properly – and failing. I sent two plaintive messages to Smile because I can't get access to several bits of security information – special name, special date etc – and have forgotten them. They seem to be taking security to ludicrous

extremes. I got the Smile website login working well but my mobile app, which is far more convenient to use, was totally bugged.

We had linguine with green (me) and red (Pat) Pesto for dinner, with plenty of Parmesan and Pecorino to sprinkle.

The Mercedes Owner Manual didn't arrive yesterday.

The afternoon was filled with Queen's tennis, climaxing with Andy Murray's return to competition. It was great to see him playing almost like his old self, and we didn't have much trouble accepting the fact that this crazy Nick Kyrgios managed to steal the last game and the match from him. We are confident that he will be back on full form at Wimbledon. Kyle Edmund did well, too.

### **Wednesday 20 June 2018**

Today started with a beautifully sunny morning, perfect for our walk (completed in a brisk 20 minutes 54 seconds) but the sky rapidly turned fairly dark grey. The temperature and humidity were quite high, though, and when I walked to the shop for milk and cash for the gardeners I was sweating buckets.

Pat was much better this morning so I had to let her try some ironing. I had fed three batches through the washer and dryer last night and early this morning, so she had plenty to do.

All that left me waiting for the post and the car manual in particular. This complicated machine had faced me with a lot to learn!

The post didn't arrive until mid-afternoon, and for a while I was so pleased to have the Merc manual that I didn't notice the words 'Electric Drive' on the cover. I came crashing down to earth. I looked at the Ebay entry again and noticed that the photo had the book face-down – deliberately dishonest or just stupid? All I could do was to go through the Ebay refund and return routine.

I had been so looking forward to sitting in the car with the book and finding out what all the mysterious bits did that I felt really depressed.

### **Thursday 21 June 2018**

The depression really hit when I returned to bed from a pee at around 5am this morning. I tried all my usual anti-insomnia tricks but nothing worked, and in the end I got up at 6:45. At least seeing Bailey would cheer me up a bit, and my usual early-morning routine would keep me busy.

I decided to try the white fabric ProSport ankle supports under my socks, and they felt quite comfortable.

It was a cool (12 degrees), dull morning – not brilliant for Midsummers Day! - so our walk was less sweaty than recently. We did the circuit in just over 21 minutes and then I sat down with a cuppa to print the return label for the handbook. I tried to find out who the previous owner was but the details weren't on the registration document and I couldn't find the details on the Web, so I searched Ebay for the right book yesterday afternoon, but with no success. Now my revised plan is to try one of the Evans Halshaw branches which is a Mercedes dealer. Surely Mercedes must have some stock of old manuals...?

After breakfast I phoned the Mercedes dealership in Doncaster and spoke to a helpful young man called Jack in Parts. After carefully checking that he had the correct document, the Owner's Manual, he ascertained that he could get one from Germany in about five days at a cost of about £30. He took my details and ordered it for me straight away. Phew! Meanwhile I will read chunks of the Electric Drive book!

I did the second batch of chips in the new air-fryer, but with King Edwards in the hope that they would be better than the Maris Pipers, but when served with fish fingers they weren't actually as good. I must identify the best chipping potatoes – and then try to find them!

I kept the ankle supports on until bedtime quite comfortably.

### **Friday 22 June 2018**

I got up at 6:50 again when the bladder would not be denied, after a restless night – at around 3am I actually read for a while and I think that did help to get me back to sleep. Thought: would it be worth trying a week with and a week without Tamsulosin?

Midsummers Day Plus One looked far better, though the temperature was only 11 or 12 degrees. I put the ProSports on again, but by the time we got back from a decent walk in about 22 minutes they were feeling a little uncomfortable, so I took them off to reveal deep grooves in the swelling above the ankles.

I needed to change the beds this morning, as we have got a bit behind with Pat's back problem putting the brakes on all but essential laundry, and if I was up to it I planned to mow the lawn after lunch. By that time the temperature had rocketed, so I decided to see if I could do the grass tomorrow morning if it wasn't wet with dew.

We did an audit of the fresh food boxes in the fridge and found that almost all the salad stuff had gone off, so I had to do yet another shopping trip so Pat could make her planned Caesar Salad for dinner. Amongst the stuff I bought from Sainsburys was some cooked ham which we cut into strips to add to the salad. It turned out to be totally tasteless (just a hint of salt) and we fed most of it to the dog who is less fussy than we are. Otherwise the salad was very enjoyable.

I spent quite a long time in the car on the driveway during the afternoon with the Owner's Manual, learning to use the digital manual which is built into the car. I discovered quite a lot of new information and discovered that the CD drive handled not only standard audio CDs but also my home-made MP3 collection, which has over 80 of my all-time favourites on it. The sound quality was excellent.

### **Saturday 23 June 2018**

I seem to have lost the knack of staying in bed until 9am on weekend mornings. My hyperactive bladder and head full of worries make relaxing difficult. I got up sometime before 8am (down in time for the 8 o'clock news on Radio 4) and had breakfast all laid by the time Pat came down.

I had been thinking about the servicing of the car and decided that I wanted to keep the main-dealer history unblemished. I emailed Barry, the salesman who

sold us the car to ask whether I had signed up for Evans Halshaw's service plan and if they had the car's service book. He confirmed that I had signed up but gave me the information I will need on Monday to get un-signed (signed down?). I found the direct debit on my Smile banking site and deleted it. I will need to phone the company managing the package to cancel it tomorrow. Barry told me that Mercedes don't use service books but just give customers a printout from their central computer system, one of which should have been part of the mountain of paper we collected in the course of buying the car. It was in the folder – a very basic list of work done. I did a survey of Mercedes garages near me, and found that the Sheffield one was near the dreaded Meadowhall shopping monstrosity and just a mile closer than the Doncaster one, which I should be visiting to pick up my Manual later in the week. I will get onto Mercedes-Benz's own service package, hoping that they do a collect-and-return service or lend customers tasty Merc courtesy cars like the Audis I used to get from their Sheffield garage, the top model being an A6 S-line. I should have the service plan in place by the end of the week.

### **Sunday 24 June 2018**

I managed to stay in bed until around 8:30am this morning, feeling quite relaxed – still thinking about all sorts of stuff but without the usual agitation and anxiety.

I did a quick mini-shop at the Co-op after breakfast (Sunday toast and stuff). The main target was a garlic and herb spatchcock chicken, which we tried once before and really enjoyed. I managed to get one and picked up one or two other bits, including three bottles of mid-range white wines. Then we settled down with toasted cheese sandwiches while England clobbered Panama in the World Cup and then Djokovic versus Cilic in the Queens Club final, which dragged on rather a long time.

I made a big batch of chips from Albert Bartlett Rooster potatoes to go with the chicken. I am still not quite convinced about the dry fryer...

I intended to water all the container plants before bed but by the time I was ready it was quite dark, heavy clouds having defeated the midsummer sky.

### **Monday 25 June 2018**

Having failed to water last night I was determined to do it this morning, so I got up at 6:45. My right foot and ankle were quite painful so I took the walk gently, only going to the end of our street and back again in 14¼ minutes. Afterwards, I locked Bailey in the house because he goes berserk when the hose is in use, and got going, giving everything a good drenching as the forecast was for a very hot day.

Both feet continued to hurt very badly through the day, so I took two Paracetamol and one Naproxen and felt better by bedtime.

The forecast was dead right, and by the time I had loaded up two duvets, two pillows and two packages of bedlinen, all guaranteed flame-retardant, which the fire and rescue service had sent to us as proxies for Anton, who is known to smoke in bed, and Pat had done his bacon rolls, we were very grateful for the Mercedes's superb climate control, which gave us a comfortable drive over. The good work was quickly undone when we got into Anton's horrendously overheated house. His central heating had been on full continuously, ever

since it was installed a few years ago! We spent an hour or so there and then we were very glad again to get into our mobile fridge.

Pat wanted to get a birthday card, so we stopped off at Welbeck, the enterprising estate near Worksop which has a large garden centre with a gift shop and various clothing franchises, not to mention my very favourite food shop, the Welbeck Farm Shop. One she had got what she wanted we decided to pick up some goodies for lunch. As always, this added up to around £50-worth of wonderful cheeses and other amazing things. Lunch under the parasol in the garden was quite special with this lot to go at, including French elderflower liqueur with Fever Tree elderflower tonic for Pat and about half a bottle of Soave – and nice light Italian white.

I had converted the car into a good imitation of a van to make room for Anton's bedding, so I had to put it back to standard 4/5-seater configuration with the fierce sun still beating down. I also had to wrap the B-class Owner's Manual – Electric Drive version and attach the Ebay return label ready for a trip to the Post Office tomorrow morning. With all that done it was approaching 5pm and time for a cup of tea.

The outside temperature was just over 30 degrees by late afternoon.

Later on, amazingly, I managed a very small repeat of my car-crash into the front of the house. I decided to back the car round into some shade to get it out of the searing heat, and somehow mismanaged the wretched electronic parking brake. The car rolled back about a foot and thumped into the end of the battered bay window. This time the damage was just a scratched area, and when I had gone over it gently with a wet Scotchbrite scourer it didn't look too bad. Some T-Cut, perhaps...? It wasn't until later that I discovered that the off-side rear light had hit the edge of the UPVC window sill and was quite badly broken. Bring back the handbrake!

## **Tuesday 26 June 2018**

I got up at 6:45 after a longish restless spell. I had slept reasonably well in spite of the heat and felt quite rested. The feet were relatively comfortable, and I managed the full walk in just over 21 minutes. The temperature was 14 degrees when we set out and had risen to 17 by the time we got back, with a forecast maximum of 25.

I tried the T-Cut, which cleaned round the scratches but didn't make much impression otherwise.

I went down to the village garage, where I had had various cars serviced until we bought the Focus from the Ford dealer and were able to use the main-dealer servicing plan. They ordered me to whole new rear light (you can't get just the lenses, it seems) which should arrive on Thursday.

Having taken the regular dose of two Paracetamols with one Naproxen when my pain got really bad, and getting quite a bit of relief, I decided to go back to the two-a-day dosage of the anti-inflammatory on the trial basis tomorrow.

The day became more and more tiring, with the temperature rising to well above 30 degrees by mid-afternoon.

## **Wednesday 27 June 2018**

I got up at 6:45 after sleeping fairly well all night without getting under the covers at all. The morning was quite foggy, but was clearing by the time we were ready for our walk. My feet weren't comfortable but neither were they really painful, so we were able to do our lap in 21¼ minutes, just five seconds longer than yesterday,

Bailey was due to see the vet at 10am for his annual health check and boosters.

Before breakfast I updated my 14-day pill box with a Naproxen in each morning and evening slot and took one with the usual Cetirizine and Omeprazole after breakfast.

We went across to Jackie and Bob's place to leave a birthday present for their daughter and Pat's and my favourite niece, Bex. As we set out for home we considered lunch at Whitby's, South Yorkshire's cathedral of fish and chips. It didn't take much considering even if we weren't feeling very hungry! Haddock, chips, mushy peas and tartare sauce went down really well, in my case washed down with a bottle of genuine Italian Peroni beer.

Once we were out of our superbly climate-controlled cocoon of a car, the afternoon was all about trying to avoid the heat. After our monster lunch, 'dinner' was a Co-op fruit loaf, toasted and buttered.

I finally closed the sitting-room window and the outside door of the conservatory at some time between 9:30 and 10pm, leaving the rooms reasonably cool.

#### **Thursday 28 June 2018**

After a reasonably restful four-pee night I was full awake at about 5:30am. I have no serious worries at the moment (a nice change) but still managed to be preoccupied with cancelling the Evans Halshaw service plan and getting on the Mercedes one, which I will do when I collect the Owner's Manual from Mercedes Doncaster (no news of this yet). There was also the matter of whether I could get a polish that would fill the scratches on the corner of the rear bumper.

I got up just before 6:45. After a full day of Naproxen my feet were feeling quite good and stood up to the walk (21 minutes 45 seconds) very well. I really wanted to get off the NSAIDs, but it seems that I may have been a bit over-eager. I have felt just a little wavy and woozy since restarting, though, so I may try cutting the two-a-day down to one – maybe leave the breakfast one but give the dinner one all night to work.

I had a look at Amazon for scratch cures before breakfast and ended up pretty confused. I tried rubbing some car polish into the scratches but they remained visible.

I needed to collect the Owner's Manual which Jack had imported for me. I really believed that he was at Mercedes Doncaster, but a piece of paper on the desk gave the Chesterfield phone number, so I called Doncaster Parts and they knew nothing about Jack. I called Chesterfield and there he was! This was odd because I hadn't considered Chesterfield as our 'local' Mercedes dealer. However, on consulting the map and considering that I



actually know Chesterfield better than I do Sheffield and Doncaster, I decided it would be a better choice.

I also wanted to set up a service plan for the car, with a monthly payment which would pay for all routine services and MoT tests, so I planned to go to Parts for the manual and then visit Service. I did a fair bit of research with Google Maps and Apple Maps, but was confused by the fact that the address in Lockoford Lane showed a street in pieces. It seemed that it was a long road which, like others in the old town, had got chopped into pieces by the building of the A61 bypass. Postcode searches suggested the garage would be close to the big Tesco on the bypass, but for safety's sake I programme the postcode into the Garmin satnav. This has never let me down, but today for some reason the lady seemed to be suffering from a speech defect. We were guided all round the houses, so in the end I parked and phoned the garage. They gave me directions which confirmed my theory about the Tesco roundabout, and we were soon parked up and admiring the most spectacular array of Mercs imaginable.

We found Parts, and the young man behind the counter turned out to be Jack. He handed over the Manual and took just under £30 from me, and told us we needed to go to Sales reception to contact Service.

We went into the main showroom and initially found nobody, but then a very attractive young woman appeared. I explained what she wanted, and she said she would process our service plan even though she had been leaving at the end of her shift. We had a delightful half-hour with her and left, assured that she would email all the details to me within a couple of days. When services were due we would have the option of the car being collected from home and returned after the work, or of dropping the car off ourselves and leaving with a courtesy car. The first option appealed, but looking at the magnificent array of cars in the showroom made the second look pretty attractive too!

So – missions accomplished!

While we were out I had had a call from the local garage who were going to replace our rear light lens. I phoned them back and arranged to take the car down at about 4pm tomorrow. The job would not take long so I would be able to wait. When they used to do our servicing I used to walk back home from their place and back down later to collect the car, but with my legs and feet in the state they are in now this wasn't an attractive option.

### **Friday 29 June 2018**

Unusually, I got back to sleep after waking at around 5 this morning. I did the usual counting-backwards routine but seemed to be awake for quite a while, but I snapped to suddenly at exactly 7 o'clock, feeling as though I had been awake for quite a long time.

The morning was dull and mild. We finished the walk in 21¼ minutes, coming home to find Pat already downstairs for breakfast.

She spent most of her morning ironing and I spent mine trying to track the clearance of a four-figure cheque from her. My online banking site's transactions list showed the cheque paid in but without the balance being affected, which I thought rather ominous. Pat's account showed a full debit, which was even weirder...

I set an alarm on my phone for 15:15 to remind me to take the car down to South Carlton Motors. The new rear light was installed very quickly.

### **Tuesday 3 July 2018**

Events have got in the way of the diary.

The weekend was fairly uneventful, with a fun visit from Ewan and Tom from Saturday evening until Sunday lunchtime.

Monday, with Pat's back still giving her a lot of pain and having prevented her from driving the new car, meant Anton's for both of us. He was willing to be taken to the bank for once, and I was lucky enough to park on a long bus-stop right outside the bank with his blue badge displayed on the dashboard. Nobody objected, so mission accomplished. We went to visit Barney after Anton. He is preparing for his return to University, so we took him to the pub where he used to work for lunch outside in the sunshine.

I was either awake or very restless from some time after 3am this morning, and when my bladder demanded attention for the fourth time at 6:30 I decided it wasn't worth getting back into bed, so the morning routine started unusually early.

The two Naproxens a day seem to be working, because my feet were pretty painless. We did the usual walk in 18 minutes 55 seconds – a much shorter time than we have done for ages – in fact, the shortest since we started the new route.

Today we had a meeting with two social workers and one care manager. The care company's offices, just outside the centre of Sheffield, had an eccentric car park with alternate rows running across bands of steep slope. It was very full, so I rushed to grab an empty bay, only realising too late that reversing back up the slope might be a challenge with the stupid electronic parking brake. I was worrying about this all through the meeting, but I managed a reverse hill-start. Oh for a proper handbrake! The car has something called hill-start assist, which keeps the brakes on for a short time after you take your foot off the pedal, but I don't think it works in reverse!

### **Thursday 5 July 2018**

My one good night's sleep hasn't been repeated, and I stayed up after the fourth pee of the night at 6:30. The walk was good, apart from a lady with two Westies, one of which had a robust plastic muzzle on and reacted with real aggression towards Bailey while the other just wagged its tail. I managed to drag Bailey away without a real war breaking out.

I have had a letter from the builders confirming that the insurance company has authorised them to go ahead with the repairs as soon as I have paid them our £200 excess. They don't seem to take credit cards so the choice is a cheque in the post or an Internet bank transfer. I tried to log into my Internet banking site at just after 8am this morning and couldn't get in, which looked like limiting my choice! It has been fine for ages, so I didn't know what was going on today. Later on it worked, and I managed to transfer the £200 and do an update on my long-term bank-account spreadsheet, as well as planning regular monthly payments back into the savings account, which has taken a bit of a hammering lately. I was desperate to get my hair and beard cut

yesterday but on both visits to the barber's shop three or four elderly gentlemen occupying the waiting seat. I decided to wait until today as I had vague memory of late Thursday morning being a slack time. I went up at 11:15 just as the only customer, a small boy, was getting out of the chair, and got myself thoroughly tidied up with a grade 2 on the top of my head and a 1 for the rest, including the beard, all for £7:50. Actually I will be glad when it all grows a bit, because I look almost bald and my stubble reveals deep lines on my face which I've never noticed before. The hairier I am, it seems, the younger I look!

On the way home I tried to test the car's 'ECO start/stop' function, which stops the engine when the car is stationary to reduce pollution – at a traffic-light, for example – and re-starts it when the clutch or accelerator pedals are depressed. It didn't work, despite being switched on. I checked the new Owner's Manual, which referred me to the online version, and didn't learn anything new. I have been switching the function off whenever I start the engine, but switching it on again doesn't seem to make any difference. More tests tomorrow, maybe, because I don't want to be ambushed by the stupid system.

### **Friday 6 July 2018**

Bailey had had a serious 'toilet problem' on the hall carpet and kitchen tiles during the night. It took me a good (or bad!) half-hour.

We were both very anxious though, because we heard from various sources this morning that Alistair had had a major crisis during the night and had been admitted to hospital. Pat was relieved when she finally managed to get a text from him and to speak to him on the phone later. He must have improved as he asked us to bring some puzzle books when we visit him tomorrow.

Tonight I made probably my best air-fried chips so far to go with fish fingers (lazy and infantile but nice!) with Sainsbury's Lady Balfour spuds, cooking them for 25 minutes, resting them for about half an hour and giving them another 15 minutes.

I was concerned because the Garmin satnav hadn't worked well when we were looking for Mercedes Chesterfield, with all the voice instructions marred by what sounded like a serious speech defect. Once I had found a charger I left the Garmin on charge and switched on in case the voice problem had been down to lack of power.

I had discovered that connecting the Garmin to a computer via USB didn't give it auxiliary power, so I tried a USB mains charger and this woke the unit up in the same way as connecting it to the car's cigar lighter does. It came to full life at once, allowing me to search for addresses, adjust volume and program in the hospital's address.

### **Saturday 7 July 2018**

I didn't get a weekend lie-in because, after checking the time before 6am, I couldn't get back to sleep. I was worrying more than I should about finding the hospital in Wakefield. It is just over the road from Pinderfields Hospital, where we visited Alistair a few weeks ago, and we managed to find that ok!

By the time I got up at about 7:15 I had decided to investigate the Merc's navigation functions, but was quickly disappointed when I got the message – which I had seen before and forgotten – telling me that no SD card with navigation software was installed.

I went back to the Garmin and eventually found the settings. I switched the voice from the speech-impaired lady to someone called James, and the little I heard sounded fine. Phew! Nevertheless, I think I'll ask the garage to install a card when the car goes in for a service on the 26 June. They seem to cost around £50 on the open market, and the software is from my old friends at Garmin. It will be a lot easier to control a built-in GPS system than one stuck on the windscreen while driving.

By breakfast time I was feeling quite a lot less anxious about the hospital visit, though no more relaxed about what is happening with Alistair and that that is doing to Pat.

I haven't mentioned them much in the diary but my vision really is deteriorating quite quickly. I have been trying to get some more of the drops the consultant prescribed on the 16 May but communication between the hospital and the GPs seems to be pretty limited. If the first bottle runs right out I will have to buy another over the counter for about fifteen quid. I have another appointment on the 3 October, with Mr Dinakaran, the guy who ordered my brain scan, this time. Meanwhile, gooey eyes and ever-proliferating floaters, are making life more and more difficult. The floaters appear as mobile, translucent clouds with pretty clear vision in between, but it is difficult to keep my centre-of-focus in the gaps by flicking my head up and down or from side to side.

We set out after a quick lunch. The Garmin decided to send us up the M1 rather than the A1(M) and the drive seemed very long. It was great driving the Merc to the 70mph speed limit, with occasional 'drifts' up to 80. The ride was smooth, the road noise was low (except on th newly-laid gravelly bits), and the controls were light and easy to manage. The Garmin found the M62 to Wqakefield and then navigated us painlessly to the junction where Pinderfields (the main general hospital) was and took us to the smll unit we were looking for. We had two hours with Alistair, who seemed in better form that we had expected, before heading for home. I pointed the car in the right direction for the A1(M) and the Garmin surrendered straight away, The journey was much faster than the one using the M1, with much lighter traffic and a familiar finish at home.

## **Tuesday 10 July 2018**

Yesterday was fairly uneventful. We had a good walk and then Pat did her usual preparations for visiting Anton. She insisted on going by herself, so I made sure she had the Owner's Manual for the car, with a copy of the insurance certificate and the phone number for Mercedes Rescue. She texted to say she had arrived and got home safely a few hours later.

I had a weird night last night. I got up for a pee at about 3:45am and just couldn't get back to sleep. Counting backwards from 200 didn't work, and nor did singing my favourite folk songs in my head. I know that I was conscious between 5 and 6 o'clock, but I must finally have dropped off, because I snapped awake suddenly at around 6:30 with vivid recollections of a perfectly

lucid dream in which I was guided by a woman colleague to a space in a large seaside car park. The details even included the fact that private spaces had yellow lines and spaces had white ones.

I felt very groggy and shaky, and when it got close to 7am, when I would normally get up I decided to allow myself a lie-in. Once I was up I decided that the dog's walk would have to be missed today, and I spent the morning being very lazy.

Pat had to post some letters, so she took Bailey with her to the Post Office, getting the full poo-bag experience.

Pat wanted me to go to Wakefield to see Alistair in hospital, but I really didn't want to go. She decided she would go alone, and after a lot of discussion I set the Garmin sat-nav up for her. She was very unsure about this, but eventually she set off and a text reported her as having arrived safely. She got home safely too, also with the aid of the Garmin, and I think she was finally a convert. The GPS had taken her up the M1 and back down the A1(M) – quite a big circuit! Her two solo drives this week had got her accustomed to the Merc's strange ways and she was feeling much more confident in it.

The good news was that Alistair was back home.

While she was out I got some potatoes and milk from the One Stop Shop and by the time she got back I was well into the preparation of a large batch of mashed potatoes rich in butter and cream. With a can of Branston baked beans, with HP Sauce of course, and some of Sainsburys' more up-market chipolatas these made an unusually filling and enjoyable dinner. I also fitted in a superb tennis match with Serena and a willowy blonde Italian named Giorgi (pronounced 'Georgie' and *not* 'Zhorzhie' as the commentators insisted on calling her). I am getting really pedantic about foreign pronunciations!

### **Wednesday 11 July 2018**

After the previous night, last night was wonderful. I slept soundly through to 5:30, when the bladder called, and was able to settle back really comfortably in bed. Although I didn't get back to sleep, I was pain-free and very relaxed, lying face-down, occasionally switching sides and, unusually, not worrying much about anything. I could happily have stayed there all morning, but I decided to revive the 7:15 reveille, and made tea, revived my mobile and completed my ablutions in time for the 7:30 news summary on Radio 4.

It was a pleasant morning, mild but fresh, with the sun mostly lurking behind light clouds. We met a little pug without problems and completed the circuit in 20 minutes 24 seconds.

I spent a lot of time sorting through the filing tray on the desk, shredding sensitive stuff like our names and addresses and filling the waste-basket with other unwanted paper, some of it dating back some years.

Pat was still feeling pretty good about her success with the GPS which took her to Wakefield via the M1 and back home via the A1(M) yesterday, and I was really impressed.

We are both agreed that, apart from a few redundant innovations, the car is a great drive. The electronic parking brake is nowhere near as intuitive and controllable as a 'proper' handbrake (as I found out when I did my reverse hill

start in the steeply-sloping office car park last week), and the EcoStop feature which switches off the engine at traffic lights is infuriating if you forget to switch it off very time you start the engine. I hope I will eventually find an option in Settings that will enable me to disable the feature permanently. Starting itself is unnecessarily complicated, too: turn the key two clicks the depress the clutch pedal before turning the last bit against the spring to fire up the starter. Luckily I'm used the declutching when starting the engine as this was recommended for the Focus to save fuel a reduce the load on the battery.

It was a good day at Wimbledon, though the magical Federer was off form and was knocked out by the rather unprepossessing but unnaturally tall South African Kevin Anderson (yes, I know I'm biased from two years working for De Beers Industrial Diamonds with some pretty obnoxious Boers at the send of the sixties!).

It was a pretty dire evening in Moscow, though, watching Croatia knock England out of the World Cup after everything had been looking really good. Fortunately I'm not a real football fan so my disappointment was bearable.

### **Thursday 11 July 2018**

I had a restless night, feeling that I had hardly got off to sleep at all after a midnight pee. but I didn't do much worrying. I got up at 6:45 and – with me keeping up a really brisk pace with no significant pain (I have noticed that the right foot gets very stiff and painful to walk on after sitting or lying for a long time but feels quite good once I'm on the move) – we did the walk in a record time of 18 minutes 11 seconds. It was a dull morning, with a temperature of around 13 degrees. With just a shirt it definitely felt a little chilly.

We have been getting a little annoyed at the delay in starting the repair work on the front of the house, but when I checked I found that it is only seven days since I transferred the £200 insurance excess to the builders' bank account.

I want to shift the rest of the huge pile of paper today and get a complete file on the car and its associated insurance claims put together.

We are expecting Alistair and the boys for two nights this weekend, so I need to shop for some essentials. I will get some more oven-ready French fries to cook in the air fryer, and maybe some other substitutes for takeaway – chicken nuggets, perhaps.

We both prepared some food for the weekend and I did quite a big shop at Sainsbury's, including frozen French fries and something similar to the 'popcorn chicken' we often get from the takeaway to finish in the air fryer, which should save some money and long waits.

I have pretty well got the paperwork mountain under control and have chased the builders about the front room window as it is too bloody hot not to be able to open any windows!

### **Friday 13 July 2018**

I was up well before 7am today because something was beeping outside the bedroom door. I discovered that it wasn't the smoke alarm needing a battery but the CO detector (installed with the wood-burner) announcing that it should be replaced.

Pat came down for some Ibuprofen very early, before returning with her painful back to bed. She couldn't have settled well because I heard the shower pump shortly after 8.

It was a pleasantly fresh morning at 14 degrees and we had a good walk. My legs and feet were still going well, though the soles felt a little bruised at the end of the 20 minutes 13 seconds.

By 8:30 I had set up for breakfast, and then read (and mostly deleted or blocked) all my unread emails, downloaded two new bank statements, and updated the bank-account, walks and weight spreadsheets. The last one was pretty good news, with a modest but positive weight loss.

MS *Outlook's* attempts to block named email senders don't seem to be doing much good. Every day I get offered contacts with Russian and Brazilian women!

After discarding the quarter-full dog-smelly bag from the heavy SEBO vacuum cleaner and putting a 'pet-friendly' fragrancener in the new bag, I had a vigorous and very sweaty bout with it. Our new polypropylene carpets give the vac almost as much grip as the deep-pile ones upstairs and in the front bedroom, making the job really hard work.

Afterwards, for light relief, I managed to contact my log man, who confirmed that he is still selling firewood and, better, now only does logs. The softwood offcuts from his sawmill got us through last winter but burned so quickly that I was forever attacking them with my felling axe and hauling heavy baskets in. He also told me that he has gone back to delivering logs in builders' bags rather than loose in his pickup. This will make the delivery a bit more manageable and give us more bags for ferrying our garden refuse to the recycling centre (or 'tip' as I always call it).

The next job was to scour Amazon for a carbon monoxide detector, which was soon ordered.

I had a look at the 'battle of giants' between Isner and Anderson and was agreeably surprised. It wasn't just an exchange of aces and both players showed considerable and varied skills.

### **Monday 16 July 2018**

It was good having Ewan and Tom here for two nights, though they had to leave very early yesterday for ju-jitsu in Buxton yesterday morning. We took them to a family fun day at our local Civic Centre (or Village Hall as we used to call it!). There was a big craft fair and displays by the fire brigade and the police, so the boys had a good poke around on a full-size fire engine and a fully-equipped police van, encouraged by very enthusiastic and helpful staff. There was also a display of the most stunning birds-of-prey which the boys could have on their wrists for a photo. We managed to watch the ladies' final at Wimbledon and then did our best to replicate the takeaway foods they like best with various frozen bits I had picked up at the Co-op, along with minced-beef (in Ewan's case Quorn mince) pies, peas and gravy.

Sunday was dominated by the men's final, with Kevin Anderson (conqueror of John Isner at a mere 6 feet 8 inches) eventually losing to Djokovic. We ended the day with very small helpings of pie and peas.

I got up for the loo just after 6:30 this morning, after what seemed to have been a decent night's sleep. The temperature was 17 degrees but the sun was breaking through and we had a good, brisk walk, finishing in just under 20 minutes. A bit later I had another walk because we had run out of the big white baps Pat likes to use for Anton's all-day-breakfast sandwiches, but the bakery van hadn't reached our One-Stop Shop so she (and he) had to make do with two smaller rolls from our freezer.

Once she had gone I did the usual Monday admin stuff, doing a careful analysis and update of the bank-account spreadsheet, including copying, pasting and replacing to generate the August section (much less easy with the new version of *Excel* than it used to be). I then spent half an hour installing the new CO alarm before watching Putin arriving in Helsinki to meet Trump (they deserve each other!). Pat seemed to be taking a long time getting home from Sheffield, but she phoned at around midday to say she was shopping at the Welbeck estate gift shop. She had had a successful and fairly easy morning with Anton, so I urged her to relax and take her time.

Having driven to Anton's twice or more and to Wakefield visit Alistair, Pat is now in the unusual position of being as confident and competent driving the Merc as I am. I haven't driven it more than a few miles for quite a while, though I have done several Anton Mondays and did the first drive to Wakefield a couple of weeks ago, so I should get a few more miles under my feet before taking it to Chesterfield for a service next Tuesday afternoon, returning in a courtesy car which will presumably also be a Merc, and going back the next afternoon to bring ours home again.

I needed to pop to t'Co-op later for a small batch of groceries and took the opportunity to practise a few starts (because the process isn't as simple as it was in the Focus) and then a brosk spin around the country lanes.

## **Tuesday 17 July 2018**

After a fairly long restless spell I got up at 6:35, which gave me time to brew a pot of tea, do my ablutions and pour a cup before the full 7 o'clock news started. It was a beautiful sunny morning, with no wind and the temperature at around 17 degrees. The village was pretty deserted for the whole of our 20½-minute walk.

Something has upset my guts this morning. I don't know whether it was the dinner I improvised with heated-up chicken nuggets left over from Friday and Saturday with the boys, or what. Maybe the increased – but correct – dosage of Naproxen.

I had skipped last night's Naproxen as part of my dosage-varying experiment, and my feet were stiff and aching when I got up. They eased a little when I got moving, but were protesting by the time we got home. I wondered about takiing the one dose in the evening instead of the morning, or perhaps taking two half-tablet doses each day – I checked the 'caplets' to find a groove to help crack them in half and took a half this morning.

Bailey managed to loosen the hinges of the gate last week in his eagerness to get to the door or the mail, and I tried several tricks with glue and filler but failed to stabilise them. Alistair found some two-part plasterboard fixings in a box in the garage. They did the job superbly, but we only had a couple. I have



had plenty of trouble keeping things attached to our stud and dot-and-dab walls over the years. This device consists of a zinc-plated tapered screw which self-taps into a bradawl pilot hole and lies flush with the surface. Into this a bolt is driven to attach whatever I want to stay on the wall. This expands the screw and even turns the end over to lock the device in the plasterboard. I found a variety of these on Amazon this morning and ordered a pack of 25 for £3.99 from Amazon.

Pat went out with Sue to meet Steph for a girl's morning, so I had to stay in to accept Amazon purchases for both of us. My outstanding one is a four-pack of genuine Italian dried gnocchi, but I have no idea what Pat's are apart from some hair products. Today's dinner will be a mixed salad with hard-boiled eggs and, probably, tinned mackerel fillets in oil, which I will prepare this afternoon.

I have been getting really fed up of trying to do my routine spreadsheet work using the latest version of MS Excel. Talk about a triumph of style over content: I use search-and-replace a lot and I can never remember where this is hidden. So this morning I decided to open a backup version of my bank statement spreadsheet in *Open Office Calc*, and found to my delight that it looked exactly like my old faithful friend from *Office 2003*. I am already using *Open Office Writer* for this diary because it outputs my content in PDF format for the website, so *Calc* would be a logical change. The bad news is that it doesn't behave like Excel, and the differences would badly impair my normal routine maintenance tasks. There isn't an *Open Office* email tool. I tried installing Mozilla *Thunderbird* on a recommendation from the *Open Office* gang, but I was frightened of damaging my *Outlook* settings, and anyway the new *Outlook* is nowhere near as troublesome for me as the new *Excel*. It still isn't as friendly as the 2003 version but it is manageable.

Various parcels were delivered today, including one containing fresh *gnocchi*, a pasta variant which Ewan had recently discovered and really liked with Pesto. My delivery was four 500g packs which can be stored at room temperature until next March.

I managed to contact Donna at Chesterfield Mercedes, to confirm the programme for the car's service next week: I take it over before 6pm on Wednesday and collect it between 4:30pm and 6pm on Thursday. I also asked about installing an SD card with the Garmin navigation software and data. I nearly fainted when she quoted a price of over £400. So it's back to sticking our Garmin on the windscreen. Welcome to Mercedes Land!

After Pat got back she started preparing tonight's salad, so I decided to give the car a pre-service wash, using the lunchtime washing-up water and a sponge, followed by watering cans of cold water. Although the weather had been quite mild today, I still worked up quite a sweat, and the dog enjoyed being out on the drive watching the world go by and barking fiercely at some of it.

I had a little play with the car before stopping work. The starting routine for a diesel with manual transmission which is parked in first gear is: turn the key through position 1 to position 2; depress footbrake fully; depress clutch pedal fully and shift gearchange to neutral; turn key against the spring to position 3. It makes life easier to have the driver's door or window open at this point

because the starter and engine are very quiet and may not be heard. As far as I can ascertain, it is depressing the clutch which 'unlocks' the starter.

After tea and cake I decided I needed a shower and some fresh clothes.

Pat has an appointment at the Hearing Clinic tomorrow, and then we have to correct a kids' rechargeable electric motorbike which Pat bought from Steph's online charity shop this morning. I just hope it's suitable for Ewan and Tom and doesn't cause too much grief.

I have just noticed that the diary's page count passed 600 a while ago and has now reached 610!

### **Wednesday 18 July 2018**

After a night interrupted by five trips to the loo, after each of which I seemed to have got off to sleep, I was wakened by yet another call at just before 6:30. Rather than spend half an hour tossing and turning I decided to stay up and get through my morning routine early. I made a pot of tea, visited the bathroom, poured my tea, checked the poo-bags and treats in my belly bag and laid the table for breakfast. I was relaxing when the 7 o'clock news came on. We went out as soon as it was over and were back by 7:30 after a thoroughly uneventful lap around the usual circuit, finished in 19 minutes and 40 seconds.

Pat's appointment at the hospital was for 9:30 and we were there with half an hour to spare. She was on time seeing the hearing-aid specialist, and emerged very happy because – as I had been sure would be the case – the sudden loss of hearing in one ear was due to an accumulation of wax. The was told to contact the GP to get her ears syringed.

We went on to our friend Steph's charity shop and came away with a very eccentric rechargeable motorbike for kids.

Unfortunately, we didn't get round to using *AskMyGP* until just after 5pm, which turned out to be the end of the day's provision. I will get Pat booked in tomorrow morning.

I got our lovely old appliance maintenance man booked to come and fit our 'range' cooker with a complete new oven fan assembly tomorrow, and then went through the stack of extended warranties to find out how to get the fridge's failings dealt with. I will phone their call-out number tomorrow morning.

We finished yesterday's mixed salad without much enjoyment. Most of the vegetables I bought from the Co-op a couple of days ago were completely tasteless – even celery! Luckily Pat had brought back some seriously nice cakes from Steph's village.

### **Thursday 19 July 2018**

Yesterday morning began with the usual walk and then was busy with preparations for the cooker repair. I took all the loose bits out of the large and small ovens and the grill, and laid them out on the patio. Then I dug the Karcher pressure-washer out of its bit of congestion in the garage and connected it to water and power. I was relieved to find that it hadn't died of neglect, its Dirt Blaster wand delivering its usual brutal jet. I blasted all the dirty bits, but with mixed results. The two oven shelves had several years of

fat baked onto them and this was completely unaffected by the mighty water jet. Luckily Pat remembered that we had the remains of a cleaning kit consisting of a very strong plastic bag, a pair of surgical gloves and a bottle of a very caustic chemical. Following the safety guidance very carefully, I got the shelves in the bag, tipped the fluid in and sealed the top, also *very* carefully. I then massaged the bag to spread the fluid round the shelves and left the stuff to do its evil work.

Mr Habershon's work began with dismantling the defective oven fan. This meant getting the massive cooker out of its slot, which in turn meant lifting the front clear of the stupidly-laid floor tiles. Last time he was here I invented a trick with the brickie's bolster pushed under the front of the beast and stepped on, but for some reason that failed this time. The expert suggested substituting a large garden spade, which worked brilliantly. Every nut and bolt was rusted, but he got the old fan out eventually, checked its data plate and went off for his lunch and then to Rotherham to get a replacement. He was back a couple of hours later and, with me behind the cooker and him with his head in the oven, we eventually managed to match all the studs and bolts with their nuts and threaded holes. To our great relief, the fan roared into action as soon as the oven was switched on. Once he had gone, I set about clearing up.

I had finished by the time Pat went off to the surgery to have her ears syringed. To our great relief, it turned out that the waxed-up ear was the good one, so her hearing improved considerably.

I was baffled with the eye-drop situation. When Pat was on the phone booking her appointment I took the phone over and was told that the practice had finally received a letter from the hospital and my drops would be at the pharmacy tomorrow. I went online to look at my repeat prescription order page and found that the drops were there. All my meds had tick-boxes for ordering – except the drops! They had a note saying that the prescription had been issued today – but the drops could not be ordered for a couple of weeks! Mad. I will call in at the pharmacy and ask if they are available.

### **Friday 20 July 2018**

Yesterday's antics had left my feet feeling pretty bruised, but I managed a rather slow walk this morning. When I got back, and before Pat came down, I was faced with the tedious task of replenishing my 14-day tablet box with my four different pills.

I decided to take a whole Naproxen every morning and only a half each evening, so the job began with cracking caplets in half.

I had a short shopping list of things I have been meaning to get from Sainsbury's, and I was sure Pat would want some stuff to feed the boys over the weekend, so I planned to get down there later. I had a quick shower first as my clothes were smelling rather sweaty.

The car was a little reluctant to start, but I got there without problems. I was really frustrated that, since the pharmacy had closed, I couldn't get my generic chlorhexidine mouthwash (generic Corsodyl). I knew that our local pharmacy stocked it, but it was far more expensive there. Having over-filled a trolley

and over-strained my MasterCard I returned to the car and loaded up. To my disgust, it took no less than five attempts to get the Merc's engine running.

I was really getting concerned about this, so I phoned Donna in the service department at Chesterfield Mercedes. My starting point was that maybe I should ask them to swap from me taking the car there and collecting a courtesy car to them collecting the car and bringing it back when the work is done. Instead, Donna suggested that I call Mercedes Rescue out: if they decided to take the car in they would send me a courtesy car, but with luck the rescue operative might diagnose and even cure the starting problem. The RAC guy who turned up was very friendly and helpful, and after trying various things he concluded that the problem was probably with the switch which tests whether the clutch is fully depressed. He popped this out very deftly and gave it a good clean inside and out. We tested starting a number of times and everything seemed to be working as it should. I had been turning the 'ignition' switch (it's a diesel!) to the first two stops, then depressing the clutch and turning it to the third position against the spring. This had either worked or not, but now it did every time. It was even possible to turn the switch all the way and declutch to start the engine. After more tests, we concluded that everything was probably okay and he went on his way. I feel quite confident that the problem has been solved – and that, if it hasn't, I will be able to get the cavalry out quickly.

After he had gone I went over to the pharmacy and bought a bottle of mouthwash. It turned out that my first prescription for the consultant's chosen eye drops had arrived, and I was able to get that as well.

I had another few goes at starting the car and then relaxed. However, at around 6pm I couldn't resist popping out for another couple of starts – one clutch-first and the other clutch-last. I think I prefer clutch-last. I screwed up and binned the PostIT on which I had written what turned out to be an over-complicated list of steps compiled from the instructions in the Owner's Guide – perhaps translated too directly from the German....

All in all, a pretty successful day. I will go off to Chesterfield confidently on Wednesday afternoon.

### **Monday 23 July 2018**

We had Alistair and the boys here overnight until Saturday lunchtime. We will be seeing more of them through the six-week holiday.

Last night I invented my first original recipe for the hot-air fryer: *pommes sautées*. I cut up the potatoes, put them in a pan of cold water, brought the water up to boiling slowly and simmered until the point of our sharp little paring knife would sink in about 5-6mm easily. This is what I do for roast potatoes, but I shake those around dry and then with oil before roasting. These I tipped straight into the fryer and sprinkled them with just a tablespoon of vegetable oil. I gave them thirty minutes frying and they came out looking lovely – a light tan with gorgeous golden-brown. They went really well with bacon, eggs, mushrooms, tomatoes and beans (with HP sauce). crunchy bits round the edges. Spot on for a first try! We ate this in the run-up to the German Grand Prix, really enjoying Lewis Hamilton's amazing performance – winning after starting at number 14 on the grid!

Pat went off to Anton's this morning, happily starting the car without trouble. However, she had forgotten to take her mobile phone, which made me very angry. I know we managed to drive long distances without mobiles for many years, but now that we have them we have become quite dependent on them.

I spent most of the morning wrestling with our monster 'range' cooker, which our repairer had left low at the front. The three self-tapping screws that hold the steel plinth on turned out to be driven into very hard high-density polythene blocks which made turning them extremely difficult – especially as the handle of the screwdriver had to be almost lying on the floor – as was I! I got them out, had a guess at what needed to be under the front feet and retired to the garage to cut two small squares from an offcut of the tinnest MDF I had left over from old DiY jobs. I used the garden spade to lift the front of the cooker and slid these under its front feet which, intriguingly, turned out to be quite large and circular and were mounted on screws of some sort. I found that I could turn the feet, but I put my bits of MDF under them anyway, managing to level the top of the cooker roughly but acceptably with the adjacent worktop edgings. I turned the feet to get rid of any rocking and then set about replacing the plinth. This was a nightmare, as the screw holes (keyhole shaped) were very small, making it almost impossible to see the corresponding holes in the polythene blocks. Once the threads were engaged I had the nightmare of driving the screws in and one fell out and rolled under the stove. I had to raid my dad's ancient workshop tins to find one labelled 'ST SCREWS', which I emptied onto the kitchen table and from the resulting pile eventually found three compatible screws. What seemed a long time later, these were driven home and I could tidy up. The subsequent coffee was *very* welcome, and we had a very lazy afternoon

Pat will be visiting Anton two or three more times through the week as somebody's handling of staff holidays has left him with no carer cover. We will go on Wednesday afternoon on the way to Chesterfield. It will be interesting to see what kind of courtesy car we get from a Mercedes main dealer...

## **Tuesday 24 July 2018**

In spite of the heat I had a pretty good night's sleep, waking up only briefly for a couple of quick visits to the loo. When I eventually looked at the clock I was shocked to see that it was exactly 7am. I thought I remembered checking at around 5, but this could have been a dream. It took me quite a few minutes to get over the surprise and get up before tackling the dressing routine.

It was a beautiful, bright morning with a temperature of about 18 degrees and a forecast maximum of *only* 25 degrees. There was a fresh breeze, but this had died down by the time Bailey and I finished our unevenful walk in 22½ minutes. I opened as many doors and windows as possible to let as much air in as possible.

Early in the evening the wind got up. The air temperature was around 30 degrees but the brisk wind felt quite fresh, especially on sweaty skin. I went out and did the watering before sunset, because it was pleasant walking around the garden with the breeze.

Writing this on Wednesday morning, I really couldn't remember what we had to eat last night, or what we watched on TV. Heat-induced amnesia, or what?

It came back quite suddenly: a combined effort of potato gnocchi with mushrooms, bacon and basil pesto – very enjoyable.

### **Wednesday 25 July 2018**

I recorded no visits to the loo last night until I woke for one at 6:20am. I felt really groggy and decided to go back to bed for a while. After a relaxed half-hour I got up at 6:50, with just time to catch the six o'clock news. Once I had had a cup of tea and gone through my bathroom routine I was functioning fairly well and we had a pleasant walk in the sunshine. It was good not to have to watch out for kids on bikes and scooters. We managed three poo stops and three doggy encounters without hostilities breaking out, for which Bailey got three little treats, and completed the route in 21 minutes 21 seconds.

The plan for today is to get over to Anton's at about 2pm, take him out to his favourite pub for lunch if he wants to go, then set out for Chesterfield to get the car in for servicing. We can get there at any time between 4:30 and 6pm, so setting off after about 3:45 or any time after that will be fine. We will have a courtesy car for 24 hours, but what kind we don't know. It's a Mercedes garage, so...?

I emptied everything loose from the car before having a much-needed shower, almost forgetting that I keep a couple of 'sovereigns' for parking fees and supermarket trolleys in what would be the ashtray if anyone was allowed to smoke in the car. I doubt if even a low-paid valet at a Mercedes dealership would be foolish enough to pocket customers' small change but I didn't want to put temptation in anyone's way so I retrieved what turned out to be *three* pound coins.

I am reminded of the joke that spread when the pound coin was introduced, back in the Thatcher era. The slang name suggested for the coin was 'a Maggie' because it was thick, common and thought it was a sovereign.

I got confirmation yesterday that the insurers will buy us a new fridge, which will be delivered at some unspecified time on Friday. The packaging and the old fridge will be taken away, which isn't the case with a lot of large-appliance deliveries. I had a look at the route from the front door to the kitchen to see what would need moving, and didn't anticipate any real problems. Our freezer is the same size as the fridge and was delivered a couple of years ago without difficulty.

Checking some possible anomalies on the bank website, I discovered that I can search for as many or as few transactions as I want and save the results table as a good-old *Excel*-compatible comma-separated variables (CSV) file. Copying and pasting transactions into my spreadsheet from a local file might be easier than from a web page.

We went over to Anton's, arriving just before 2pm, and managed to persuade him to come out to his preferred pub for lunch. He ate and drank agonisingly slowly, continuing long after Pat had finished her scampi and I my deep-friend chicken wings. His cheesy garlic bread and pint of Stella (which should have been a half) seemed to take forever. We got him home, though, and got ourselves to Chesterfield just before 4:30. After a long wait and some signing of documents we were taken to our courtesy car – a Mercedes GLA220d

flagged as 4matic. I think the body shell is about the same as our B-class's but the wheels are very large, with low-profile tyres, and the body rides quite high. The '4' and the high ground clearance suggested a 4x4. The 'matic' speaks for itself, so I needed a lesson in driving an automatic transmission, which was fine once I got the hang of it, but with too much electronic control. I noticed that it even has a manual mode and paddles on the steering!

Each driver is supposed to leave the car with a quarter of a tank of fuel for the next user, but our predecessor had not done this and it seemed that nobody had checked, so we got a low-fuel warning as we neared home. I should have stopped for fuel when we passed our local Sainsbury's, but chose not to. I will have to correct this before I take Pat to the dentist.

### **Thursday 26 July 2018**

I really regretted that decision when I went off into a long worry session in the small hours, losing a lot of sleep and waking up feeling quite poorly. Apart from anything else, I have to get Pat to the dentist for midday, and that is in the opposite direction from our nearest petrol station.

I got up at 6:50 and dragged myself downstairs, gradually feeling better as I got through a cup of tea. The groggy/grotty feeling which I get when I get up is rather worrying, in spite of the fact that it clears fairly quickly.

It was a lovely morning with a slightly hazy sun and a temperature of around 18 degrees. My feet were feeling quite comfortable and we had a good walk, meeting two different bull terriers amiably and getting round in 20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> minutes.

The plan for today is to get the hall prepared for the delivery of the new fridge tomorrow, in between taking Pat to the dentist and taking the courtesy car back to Chesterfield for around 4:30pm. But first I needed to get the car down to Sainsbury's. In spite of a little red icon and a message about fuel reserve being reached I managed to get down to Sainsbury's and put 7.7 litres of diesel in the tank.

After that, it was all about clearing the hall and the kitchen to allow delivery of the new fridge. I had to assess the mains connections to the fridge and the TV that sits on top of it. This required partial dismantling of one of my improvised kitchen units and revealed a shortage of good quality mains adaptors and extensions in the many boxes stored in our garage.

I spent a little time getting more used to the courtesy car and then took Pat up to the next village for her dental check-up. The most comfortable moments were when travelling with full aircon on. We had a quick bite when we got home and then sat down to try and tolerate the incredible heat. At 2:30pm my digital probe thermometer was showing over 27 degrees in the kitchen, and even with the sun blocked by cloud the usually-reliable garden thermometer showed 34 degrees! It would almost have been worthwhile to take a long roundabout route to Chesterfield as the car's climate control made it the most comfortable place we could find! The BBC Weather app was reporting 28 degrees for us from 15:00 to 18:00, but was now predicting thundery showers from 5pm to 3am and continuous showers, with or without thunder, until Saturday and more reasonable temperatures for several days thereafter.

For once the weather forecasts were good. We left home at about 3:30 and very soon I was driving through the heaviest rain I could remember ever

having seen. When the drops hit the windscreen they each made a very loud 'splat!' and spread to a diameter of at least three or four centimetres. The courtesy car wipers, when I could find the control, were very effective the sun and rain were both intermittent, and I had no trouble with the drive. We did a circuitous route to make getting off the A61 onto the road to the Mercedes garage: we got onto the dual carriageway one junction north of the one we wanted, turned south and left the next roundabout at the first exit. The Worksop exit, which we would need for the drive home, was the next one.

I was relieved to hand the courtesy car (with which I had just about started to feel at home) over and drive home in our own, with all its old-fashioned features like a clutch pedal and a gear lever! I started learning to drive in January 1960 and passed my test in May. The nearest things I had ever driven without a conventional transmission were DAF 44's bought by my Dad, with their amazing Variomatic system using wide runner v-belts and variable-diameter pulleys controlled by engine revs and inlet manifold vacuum. I test-drove an Audi A4 with the modern successor to that brilliant system, but me bought the A6 AllRoad instead. For the rest I have lived happily with clutches and gearchanges for over 58 years, and old habits die hard!

The rain had stopped by the time we got to the garage, leaving exhausting heat behind, but it came back during the evening.

### **Friday 27 July 2018**

I was awake at 6:30 this morning, when a huge roll of thunder was followed by some very heavy rain. I thought this might stop us walking today, but by the time I was ready the weather had settled down. I felt a few small drops hitting me as I set out, and about halfway round the circuit the rain increased, leaving both Bailey and me rather damp when we got home.

After breakfast, I finished clearing the last bits of the hall and kitchen for the fridge delivery, including putting back the stuff we normally carry in our car but had transferred to the courtesy car, which had been left in the hall waiting for our own car. Then I went up to the Co-op for some groceries – £63-worth! – so that we would be able to feed Alistair and the boys. What we would be serving was a mystery at this stage!

The fridge arrived about five minutes into the scheduled window but turned out to be very disappointing. Our old upmarket Hotpoint was being replaced by a very basic Indesit with a door that turned out to be almost impossible to open: if you just pulled on the handle the whole fridge slid across the floor, so it was necessary to poke the door seal to release the vacuum. Something would have to be done on Monday...

The boys were their usual super-active selves, but settled down – reasonably – to watch the first two *Hobbit* movies, which took all evening.

### **Saturday 28 July 2018**

The boys were due back in Buxton for Ju-Jitsu quite early, so the morning was a bit of a rush and then settled down. I caught some of the F1 qualifying highlights from Hungary in the early evening. The bedroom was surprisingly cold when we got upstairs to sleep under an empty duvet cover and a thin throw. I decided that my first job in the morning would be to get the 4.5-tog summer quilt out of the loft.



## **Sunday 29 July 2018**

It rained fairly steadily through the day, enough to stop me walking across to the shop for the paper – though I knew I would have to get some groceries from the Co-op when it had opened at 10am. We had decided to get one of their excellent roast-in-the-bag chickens for dinner, but they had all gone. I got an un-spatchcocked one, though, and it cooked beautifully in the recently repaired oven after the Grand Prix, which was won easily by Lewis.

## **Monday 30 July 2018**

I had an almost totally sleepless night, mostly brooding about the crummy fridge, and got up at 6:35 ready for battle with the insurance company from which I had bought the extended warranty. I spent ages on the phone, listening to recorded messages and nasty canned music, but eventually got an engineer's visit booked for Thursday. I made it very clear that I didn't consider the Indesit fridge anywhere near a replacement for our faithful old Hotpoint. I did quite a bit of research and found a current Hotpoint with roughly the same storage capabilities as the old one: clear boxes with similar capacity and a wire wine rack under the top shelf. I found a decent image of this fridge's interior and printed an enlarged version to show the engineer.

I didn't have to use my secret weapon – not yet, anyway: I have insurance plans for six appliances, each paid for by direct debit eachy month, totalling £30-34 a month or £364 per year. If I don't get a suitable replacement fridge I will instantly cancel all the direct debits.

I spent most of the morning while Pat was out at Anton's putting the corner of the kitchen back together after I had dismantled it to get at the wiring for the fridge and the TV that lives on top of it. I want the engineer to see just the fridge plugged directly into a mains socket and will reassemble the network of extensions and adaptors which I need to put the TV back (but might well contravene the insurance terms!) after he has gone.

All this stuff, added to my sleepless night, left me absolutely knackered by early evening, struggling to stay awak even during the most gripping butts of TV.

## **Tuesday 31 July 2018**

I woke up this morning after a decent night's sleep feeling fairly rested, though a bit queasy. I am wondering whether taking a senna laxative every night is stirring something up in my bowels and making my feel a bit poorly. I will try leaving the tablet out for a few nights. The problem is that, in spite of the good reports on both my colonoscopies, I have the hell of a job initiating a movement in the mornings: I have to push like crazy, and it feels as if I am trying to pass at least a golf ball – hard work, rather painful and occasionally with some blood loss. Once that has passed the rest follows fairly easily.

We had to get Bailey to the the dog-grooming service in the next village up the Doncaster road, do some shopping at the Welbeck Farm Shop in preparation for Aidan and Donni coming for dinner tomorrow night. All went well, and we were only a few minutes late collecting our very fragrant hound.

Pat spent all afternoon cooking a very posh Mary Berry steak pie topped with sliced potato and a chocolate mousse. I went to Sainsbury's after lunch to get

another pile of stuff needed for tomorrow's meal and then took a monstrously heavy wheelie bin out to the gate. I don't know how we manage to generate so much kitchen waste for landfill!

My final tasks for the day were to find a red electric kettle which both Pat and I liked and a non-rechargeable electric toothbrush. We managed a compromise on the kettle and I ordered one for delivery on Thursday, and also an Oral B non-rechargeable toothbrush due on Friday, both from Amazon, who ought to give me a large shareholding in recognition of the amount of stuff I buy from them.

### **Wednesday 1 August 2018**

I didn't take a Senokot last night and I did wake up feeling better. More important, I had a successful visit to the loo!

I got up at 6:40 and visited the bathroom after the 7 o'clock news rather than before. It was a pleasantly fresh sunny morning which turned dull towards the end of our walk, which took 20¾ minutes.

Before getting up I had formulated a plan for dealing with the fridge. I would insist that the Indesit delivered, even ignoring the faulty door, was noit a reasonable replacement for our robust old Hotpoint because it was generally flimsy and lacked the fresh food storage boxes and wine rack of the old fridge. The Hotpoint one I had found online had all we wanted, so the warranty people would have to exchange this for the Indesit. If they refused, I would cancel our six plans immediately and use the first year's saving to buy the Hotpoint. I would donate the brand-new but unwanted Indesit to the British Heart charity shop in town. I hope I get the really helpful engineer who came last time!

Having ordered a kettle and a toothbrush I searched the web for a 'Franke CPSB 651 Strainer Bowl' (the name I was sure was correct after finding it with several different searches) this is the oval plastic colander-ish thing that sits in the central bowl between our sink and drainer. I had broken one once and found a replacement online. I broke that recently and this time I found one on Ebay. I just hope it fits. A busy web-shopping week all round!

We are entertaining Aidan and Donni to dinner tonight, so Pat has been very busy, with backup from me on the vacuum cleaner and corkscrew.

The evening – and the meal – went very well and made a pleasant change from having to decide what to eat alone. Pat's rendering of the Mary Berry steak and mushroom pie (topped with potato and drenched in delicious gravy) was a great success, as was her chocolate mousse.

### **Thursday 2 August 2018**

I sipped quite a bit of white and then red wine before and during the meal last night and slept really well. I was awake sometime after 6am and felt really comfortable in bed, so I treated myself to a lie-in, getting up a bit after 7:15 instead of 6:45. My second morning without the laxative was fine.

It was a pleasant, mild morning at 17 degrees (no jacket needed) and our walk went really well. We did the round in 21 minutes. I was expecting the Indesit engineer between 11:30am and 2:30pm, and he – the same guy as last time – was rather late but very helpful. He sent in a report that we were

very disappointed with the replacement fridge and were advised to contact the insurance company regarding a different model.

### **Friday 3 August 2018**

I felt really rough when I got up this morning – shaky, slightly dizzy and muzzy-headed. I managed the walk, though, doing the round in just on 19 minutes.

Pat had arranged to meet Alistair and the boys at Bolsover Castle and was really angry when I said I didn't feel up to going.

Once she was gone, feeling a bit better after breakfast, I got stuck into emails which included a succession regarding the fridge. I confirmed that we wanted the Hotpoint and the staff member said that she had passed my message to their exchange team. Later on I got a phone-call telling me that the builders would finally be able to start repairing our front wall next Thursday. So things were looking fair to good all round.

During the day I took delivery of the kettle and electric toothbrush which I had ordered from Amazon yesterday.

I did fish fingers and dry-fried chips for dinner, and we started watching *Dicte, Crime Reporter* but Pat was too tired to sit through two hours of Danish with subtitles and went off to bed. I was recording the programme, so we would be able to start it again after breakfast tomorrow.

### **Saturday 4 August 2018**

I managed to stay comfortable in bed until after 8:30am this morning, and the atmosphere was a good deal more cordial than last night's. After a toast and marmalade breakfast we started *Dicte* again from the beginning, which kept us occupied until midday. In the middle of this my third bit of online shopping – a new basket drainer for the kitchen sink – arrived and proved to be a good fit.

After *Dicte* I went out and cleaned the intake grilles of the pond pump, watered the pot plants and left the hose end in the filter box to top the pond up.

The temperature was a little more bearable as it has been, clocking 25 degrees outside and 24 in the kitchen, with just a hint of freshness in the air.

It was quite strange not to have Alistair's boys with us on a Saturday.

### **Sunday 5 August 2018**

A pretty average Sunday with nothing significant to report except the oppressive heat (up to 32 degrees early in the evening) which made everything very tiring.

### **Monday 6 August 2018**

We did this morning's walk in just over 20 minutes with no problems.

I had agreed to go to Anton's with Pat, and we shopped for him at our local Co-op on the way. For the first time in several weeks she managed to draw him some cash on the pre-paid card set up by Executor Services, but she is still about £90 out of pocket. Anton wasn't very interested in the food we had brought – or in anything else – and was quite happy

when we left after about half an hour, telling him that we were going to see Barney.

We took Barney and his Mum Nicky out for a pub lunch and talked a lot about Barney's plans for his final year at Huddersfield Uni after the year he has missed for his successful heart surgery.

### **Wednesday 8 August 2018**

I did a quick shop yesterday morning, really because I had to go into town to collect Bailey's working tablets from the vet. I made an increasingly unusual visit to Aldi – unusual because I am no longer buying my wine there, and *that* because Pat ordered me a special-offer case of wines from the Sunday Times Wine Club and I have now ordered two more. The value is unarguable and the wines have been very good indeed so far. My latest case was sitting on the hall floor when I got home and was almost too heavy for me to lift. I managed to wrestle it through onto the kitchen table but I felt serious pain in some of the tendons in my hands. The rest of the journey, into the garage, was accomplished in three smaller batches.

Bailey missed his walk early this morning because I wasn't sure what time the guys from the window repairers were coming. They arrived at about 10:30 and were gone by 10:50, so, having given him his worming tablets and drizzled his flea and tick protection onto the back of his neck I decided to take him out. We did the usual circuit in 20 minutes 35 seconds. The rest of the morning, which was dull and not too hot for a change, was taken up with odd repairs and other minor jobs, including a full circuit of the estate with the RoundUp weedkiller spray, which had been very effective when last used to judge from the dried-up remains of the old weeds. Pat spent it ironing. I also gave all our container-grown plants a good drenching with the hose while the sun wasn't shining (there is a theory in our house that drops of water on the leaves of a plant act like magnifying glasses, focusing the sun's rays to burn the leaves).

I tried chasing the insurance company about the fridge, but I got exactly the same standard reply as before - 'We can confirm we have forwarded the details through to our Product Replacement Team and they will contact you directly.' - a verbatim repeat of what they said on Friday. (In my old Granny's Leeds dialect that 'directly' would have meant 'very soon' as 'I'll be there directly'). Unfortunately they haven't given me an email address for the Product Replacement Team, though they have given me a phone details but these seem to be for the author of the email! I suppose there is no hurry really, but I am getting pissed off.

### **Thursday 9 August 2018**

I couldn't remember what time the building firm had told me to expect their guys, so I got up just after 6:30. The first van's arrival was announced by a frenzied bout of barking from Bailey some time after 8am. The first guy had a serious look at the damaged masonry and concluded that the assessor hadn't made much sense of it, let alone given them a realistic report to warn them what waited for them. It looks like being a really challenging job, which was confirmed when the second guy arrived.

I phoned the product replacement team at Domestic and General about the fridge, having been assured that our case had been passed on to them, but the agent I spoke to suggested that I – not they – should take the matter up with another department because the replacement fridge is faulty.

I sent a very angry email in response to this and got a rather apologetic one back.

By the end of the working day we still didn't have a clear way forward with the masonry repairs. The broken decorative stones would be very difficult to replace and make a pattern that blends with the other window. The guys were sending smartphone videos back to their base but we were stuck on that. Pat and I discussed just having brickwork to match that of the house, but she wasn't really convinced. Also, this would mean removing the stonework from the other window...

Pat and I decided to drive up to Rotherham and have superb fish and chips for our tea at Whitby's. My starter was breaded whitebait and Pats was prawn cocktail, both very generous portions. By the time we had eaten our haddock, chips and mushy peas the question of pudding didn't even arise!

### **Friday 10 August 2018**

I woke at 6am and spent about 40 minutes brooding on the matter of the fridge and the problems with the front wall, so I gave up and got up at 6:40. It was decidedly cool at around 12 degrees – a welcome relief but a bit of a shock after the heatwave!

We did the usual walk circuit in 19 minutes 51 seconds, with nothing to report except a brief encounter with a Staffie that snarled at Bailey and showed an impressive mouthful of teeth.

My stropky email about the fridge had triggered a fairly placatory one promising action overnight. I then got an idiot on the phone (he sounded Dutch!) explaining a ludicrously complicated rigmarole I would have to go through to get another fridge. This prompted the following email from me:

*'I have just had a call from your company saying that they have agreed to take the faulty Indesit fridge back and provide another replacement. However, the process they have told me to follow will leave me with no food refrigeration for an unknown period of time. I have to wait for a call from a company called Panther, who will tell me when the faulty Indesit fridge will be 'uplifted'. Once it has gone, I have to phone your Product Replacement team to discuss a fridge to replace the Indesit, and they will find out what is available from their suppliers and discuss this with me before finally delivering a replacement fridge. In order for this to work, I will have to get rid of all the food currently in the fridge, which will probably have gone bad long before the new fridge arrives.*

*Is this really how the process works? To me, the only logical process would be to agree the choice of a new fridge and to deliver this and remove the faulty one in a single visit.*

*I really am beginning to wonder how I ever got involved with D&G!!!'*

### **Monday 13 August 2018**

There is nothing to report from the weekend, which was pretty uneventful.

*Except* that we booked a week's holiday in an apartment at Wells Next The Sea in North Norfolk on Booking .com! Extravagant, but we really do need a change. We had already arranged for Alistair top house- and dog-sit for the week commencing the 25 August. He is starting up again as a self-employed handyman, and there is plenty of stuff that needs doing here.

Second most notably, we managed to eat two decent square meals on Saturday and Sunday evenings – a Barnsley (butterfly) chop each on Saturday and a big sirloin steak on Sunday, both from the wonderful Welbeck Farm Shop and both served with good new potatoes hand-picked by me from Sainsbury's unwrapped stock and simply boiled with lots of butter. For Sunday I sauté'd thinly sliced onion and some big mushrooms, also from Welbeck, and we had frozen petits pois with both meals. Our desserts were dainty little crème caramels from our favourite jam make, Bonne Maman.

Some of my worries subsided a little over the weekend, but I was still restless from 6am this morning so I got up at 6:40 and listened to the 7 o'clock news before taking Bailey for his constitutional, which we did in 20½ minutes. The temperature was around 16 degrees, which was pleasant for walking.

After breakfast Pat spotted that we had a boiler service booked for the Friday before we come back from Norfolk, so I had to phone and re-book this. I looked at Post Office Travel Insurance, which we used to use when we were travelling to France regularly, but I decided it was too expensive for a simple stay almost locally. If, by any chance we have to cancel, I would just have to swallow the loss, but later in the week I remembered (I thought) and confirmed that full international travel insurance is included in our SmileMore joint current account.

As I write this Pat is putting together her weekly 'food parcel' for Anton, so there is a mouthwatering smell of bacon wafting into the study. Yesterday she wrote a long and heartfelt email to DeafBlindUK, in the hope that they could help to ensure that Anton is getting all the support to which he is entitled.

### **Friday 17 August 2018**

There has been a lot of stuff going on this week and I haven't felt much like documenting it all here.

The stupid fridge situation has kept me really wound up, angry and stressed. I spend quite a lot of time exchanging emails and phone calls with the insurance company. In the end they agreed to take the rubbish Indesit back and refund me £232, and for this to be delayed until I could buy a 'proper' fridge. Attempts to do this turned out to be pretty stressful too, I had an exchange with a company offering the Hotpoint we want on Ebay, but although they had advertised it and 'brand new' it turned out to have a small but conspicuous dent in the door, and in any case some daft rules on Ebay would forbid me to send a carrier, without my being with them in person. I gave up and decided to leave all this crap until we have had our little holiday. I did do some phoning around, though, and managed to talk to a young lady at Hotpoint who was very helpful, and I should be able to buy the fridge straight from them – when they get our

chosen model in stock! I think she said she would call me when one became available, but the whole shambles has been so confusing that I am not sure.

I have also chased the builders about the front wall repair, and I think we have agreed a way forward with that which means that they will finally be doing exactly what I had assumed they would do – restore the masonry to its original appearance.

Yesterday I took Pat for a browse round the Lakeside shopping 'resort' just this side of Doncaster. She had a disappointing time in M&S, but we had a nice lunch in the Thorntons (yes the chocolate ones) café and she got to look in Gap and a couple of other places while I sat on a bench and read my book using the Kindle app on my iPhone (the Kindle itself is getting a bit wobbly and I have been using the phone all the time at home instead, so that was fine).

With things beginning to come together around us, I managed the best night's sleep last night that I have had for weeks. The morning was rather spoiled, though, when the PC decided to get itself gummed up, getting in a real pickle over my various spreadsheets, but a couple of re-starts and an hour with the power fully off got it behaving again – I usually leave it plugged in and just let it shut itself down, so maybe I had better stop this. I don't know why I have got into the habit of leaving the six-way socket block which powers all the gear switched on.

I have decided not to update the diary online now.

Having got the PC back on its rails, I decided to start backing up my Paulwork folder regularly. For years this was done onto a lovely little external drive, but that fizzled out recently. I have a 128GB USB memory stick that lives in one of the front sockets on the PC and has plenty of free space, so I edited to little batch file that executes the backup (it says 'XCOPY F:\MyData\PAULWORK\\*. \* G:\PAULWORK\\*. \* /S /M') to send the files there. I did a direct drag-and-drop to copy the whole of Paulwork, which took an awful long time to get the 1707 files across. I also managed to re-engineer the batch file that backs up my emails to send them to the USB stick.

### **Monday 20 August 2018**

Apart from a fairly short visit from Alistair and friend yesterday to sort out the logistics of their house/dog sitting and out break in Norfolk, the weekend was pretty uneventful. Last night I cooked some Sainsbury's frozen oven fries, not in the oven but in the hot-air fryer. They came out pretty well and went down fine with my carefully fried salmon fillets.

I am feeling a bit wobbly about our break in Norfolk, but I don't really know why. Just getting old, I suppose. Pat really needs a break from the Anton situation, so I guess I will just have to let her have her head among the gift and charity shops! I think my jitters will settle down once we have found our apartment in Wells Next The Sea and had our first tastes of the wonderful local sea-food – especially the crabs. The timing for getting into the flat is pretty tight, with us due to report at about 4pm on Saturday, so I plan to get us into Wells at around lunchtime, locate the place on foot and then just doss around until four. I have no idea what we'll find to do for the week, because the weather forecast is looking rather dubious. I

think our hot summer might desert us, so sunbathing on the beach may not be an option. It would be good to take a Mediterranean tan back, though...

Bailey and I had a good brisk walk this morning thanks to well-behaved feet and legs, and we finished the route in 19 minutes. I was quite sweaty when we got back.

The issue of the blasted fridge remains unresolved. We have to find a fridge we like and get it installed, then get the improbably named Panther Logistics to collect the Indesit and phone the insurance company's Product Replacement Department to arrange our refund. Finding the desirable machine has not gone well so far.

Around midday I got the postcode for the holiday accommodation into the satnav and saved as a favourite. I also read through all the emails with the detailed directions.

## **Tuesday 21 August 2018**

Another 19-minute walk with Bailey this morning. My legs and feet aren't totally pain-free but they are doing really well. I haven't used either of the two gels much at all lately.

Good news this morning. I had received two calls from the insurance company's window contractors asking when they could first measure up and second install the replacement window. The short answer was not until the masonry – or at least the backing masonry – had been installed. I had emailed the builders asking them to liaise with the window guys but the reply was that the brickwork would be done this Thursday and Friday.

I had to get the house provisioned for the arrival of Alistair and the boys on Friday and the rest of the house/dog-sitters on Saturday, and I managed to spend about £77 at the Co-op, much of it on crisps and other trivial stuff. Then we spent most of the rest of the day reorganising all sorts of stuff around the house to fit the extra guests in. The weather was fiendishly humid and the sweat poured off me for nearly the whole day. The only refuge was the Merc with its excellent air conditioning.

I cleaned my beach sandals and 'posh' shoes ready for the holiday.

Dinner was omelettes (mine a three-egg monster filled with mushrooms, bacon and Pecorino Romano) and dry-fried chips, which were not as good as usual – a bit soft – because I had bought Albert Bartlett's white potatoes without reading the label.

## **Wednesday 22 August 2018**

I had a decent night with only two loo visits and sleep until almost 6am, after which I was working out what to do about Pat's meds running out before we get back from Norfolk but which she can't order until we have gone away. The verdict? A quick in-person visit to the GPs.

It was a pleasant morning at around 16 degrees and we had a good walk but one slowed down by no less than four poo-stops and my right ankle (the one with the 'catastrophically failed' replacement), which was quite sore on the inside.

The weather defied the forecast and got sweaty and humid by lunchtime. I got quite sleepy by 5pm and could happily have gone back to bed! I went



out to Wickes and bought some SuperGlue and contact adhesive for Pat, and scoured the garage looking for brilliant white matt emulsion to touch up a few blemishes in the study, where I helped Pat to make the room more agreeable for a sleep-in guest. The blemishes on the office wall were, in fact, fresh blood from my right elbow – I don't know how I shed it while mauling my Mum's very heavy single bed around. I found all sorts of emulsion except brilliant white – a shade I have never been without before! I hung a few favourite pictures in the study.

We settled for Branston baked beans on toast for dinner, with a generous helping of ice cream to follow for me.

### **Thursday 23 August 2018**

I had a decent night's sleep and didn't realise that we had had the best rainfall in weeks, or possibly months, until I got downstairs at 6:45am. It was a real relief to see everything looking damp and a few millimetres of water in the plant-pot saucers.

We did the usual walk in 20 minutes 42 seconds, with only one poo-stop but a bit hampered by my stiff legs and feet.

I had a bit of a nightmare checking my bank-account spreadsheet, finding that I had more-or-less drained the savings account dry. By the time I had paid the MBNA Visa balance off I needed to make some adjustments, which involved transferring a small amount from savings to current and then from the to current. We are getting through a frightening amount of money, and I really do need to find out what is doing the damage.

I discovered that I have completely lost the knack of packing for holidays. I thought I had got fairly well on top of the task by lunchtime, but it was an uphill struggle. The logistics of it all are complicated. Pat had stripped our beds and washed the sheets and pillow-cases. I put them back on but the plan is that we take them off again on Saturday morning, tuck them away and put other ones on for the guests/dog-sitters. That way we will have more-or-less fresh linen to put back on when we get home.

I found some fish fingers in the freezer for tonight's dinner, but the chips were leftovers from the local Pizza King which had been frozen after drying up on the table and didn't respond well to the air fryer.

### **Monday 3 September 2018**

Our brief holiday in Norfolk went very well. Wells Next The Sea turned out to be a much more interesting place than Blakeney, where we stayed some years ago. Blakeney is very much a village and Wells is a busy, bustling little town with an excellent selection of shops, some full of surprises. Our apartment, when we managed to navigate our way to it on August Bank Holiday Saturday afternoon, was well equipped and freshly decorated, and the check-in procedure was really clever: when we arrived, I sent a text message to a number I had been given and the reply gave me the code to the key box. We had a reserved parking space which was visible from both the flat's front windows and were literally a minute's walk from the harbour-side. We did a lot of walking round the town and also did the one-mile walk to the beach, returning on the tiny-gauge railway. The second time, we drove to the beach car park and back. The weather was excellent right through the week. We only left Wells to visit

Blakeney for a spot of nostalgia and, on another day, have a return journey on the North Norfolk Railway, riding in real old-fashioned carriages drawn by magnificent vintage steam locomotives.

Wells's two fish and chip shops were very disappointing but the nearby pub did an excellent cod and chips.

This being Monday Pat was back on duty with Anton and had a fairly pleasant visit. I was back on fridge duty and failed to find the Hotpoint we wanted anywhere on the Web. The Hotpoint website was spectacularly unhelpful, so I went back to Google and had a totally depressing morning trying to find the fridge of our choice. By tea-time I had made absolute zero progress. There was a promising link on the Hotpoint site but the department it linked to was only open from Tuesday to Friday. Tomorrow, then...

### **Tuesday 4 September 2018**

'Tomorrow' started equally frustratingly, but after a couple of hours I tripped over a link on Google which led to a site belonging to Next, and in less than five minutes I had found and bought the fridge of our choice. It would be delivered tomorrow, and less than half an hour later I had a very pleasant phone-call from Next Domestic Appliances in Manchester to sort out everything including the extended warranty.

After all the hassle, I am now sitting here wondering what on earth I need to do next. The answer is that I need to reinstall the gate that stops Bailey from attacking the front door.

This turned out to be a total nightmare. I am getting too old and stiff to kneel and lie on the floor to measure things up and then drill and screw them to the walls. I got the gate working again but decided not to rush making good the damage to the plasterboard. By the time I had dusted and vacuumed I felt pretty shattered.

I hope the fridge will arrive early, that the outgoing one can be accommodated in the kitchen and that I can get it collected by the improbably named Panther Logistics quickly.

### **Wednesday 5 September 2018**

My order acknowledgment said that I should receive a text from the delivery driver sometime after 7am this morning. I had got up at exactly 7 and the text arrived just one minute after 7, telling me he was on his way! I did a high-speed job of emptying the hated Indesit into the big cold bag with the huge freeze-block that came with the freezer and one strong carrier-bag, both of which I put out on the back doorstep as the temperature was well below ten degrees. The rest was laid out on the kitchen table, and I had just got the wretched machine emptied when the van arrived. We got the Indesit moved and I quickly vacuumed the floor where it had stood just before the doorbell rang. The fridge was delivered in its rather basic packaging – a couple of cardboard trays, several expanded polystyrene mouldings and a lot of very tight polythene, which took a lot of work with a sharp cook's knife and a pair of kitchen scissors to disengage from the fridge and left a load of refuse to be binned!. The two guys kindly put the Indesit out in the hall and left me. The new Hotpoint was a really handsome machine, 'graphite' meaning a

satiny metallic grey which sat very unobtrusively in its space compared with the glaring white Indesit. Its features all lived up to expectation – all in all much more sophisticated. I plugged it in and all looked fine. I put my fridge/freezer thermometer in and the temperature dropped really quickly into the 'refrigeration' band.

By the time Pat had got downstairs I had quite a lot of the food stashed in the new fridge, and by coffee time everything was pretty well shipshape. I phoned the collection contractors to book the removal of the Indesit, but the best they could do was next Monday. I also emailed the insurers to say that everything was under way and I looked forward to seeing the cash settlement of £232 in the bank, which would reduce the hefty £519 cost of the new fridge to a thrifty £287.

I did some careful tweaking of the very tiny controls inside the fridge and kept it showing a temperature right in the middle of the target range on the thermometer.

We went for this model because it was the nearest equivalent to our long-lived but now deceased Hotpoint, with a rack in which three or four bottles of wine can lie horizontally, and the same capacity of chiller boxes: the old one had one full-width box and two half-width ones, but this has two full-width ones but they are drawers rather than loose, topless boxes.

My fun for the early evening was trying to find out why my bank-account spreadsheet had got tangled up. After downloading a block of entries from the bank site I found the erroneous one, corrected it and all was well.

The fridge temperature was down in the freezing zone by bedtime. I will need to sort the rather difficult little controls out tomorrow. It looks really classy, though.

### **Thursday 6 September 2018**

I had a long but fairly worry-free wakeful period before getting up at 6:45 this morning. The weather looked beautiful but the temperature was just *under* ten degrees. Autumn has definitely arrived!

The fridge was still unnecessarily cold, so I tried a random push on the control button.

We went out early, just after 7:15, and managed to miss almost all the schoolkids. We met the little Bailey-replica with the white patch for another friendly encounter and then, to my delight, the Onion Lady's black Lab Chazzer, this time quite amicably. Round the next corner we met huge Fred the black-and-white Pointer being walked by a dog-sitter, and that was very peaceful, too.

I had a dig in my desktop tray and found the paperwork from the Indesit. This included a Quick-Start Guide, which seemed to have been left out of the much thinner pack from Hotpoint, so I stole it – only to find the Hotpoint sheet with the other stuff!

The temperature setting panel had a pushbutton and three LED indicator lights in a horizontal line.

OFF OFF ON = HIGH TEMP  
OFF ON ON = MED-HIGH TEMP  
OFF ON OFF = MEDIUM TEMP

ON ON OFF =MED-LOW TEMP  
ON OFF OFF = LOW TEMP

Simple once you get your head round it – and keep the guide somewhere safe or remember I've just recorded it here!

Each of our other refrigeration devices have little knobs to turn with numbers and pointers, but I guess a moving part like that is seen as something else to wear out. (We have the under-counter fridge that was left here when we bought the house in 2005, the 9ft<sup>3</sup> chest freezer we bought when we were doing a lot more cooking (and eating) than we are now and the Indesit freezer which the insurers gave us when the Hotpoint one died, and which has actually worked really well but has two shelves with drop-down doors which I invariably forget to close before the main door!)

Once I had figured this out I set the new fridge to 'high temp' (warmest or least cold), and by the time we had finished breakfast and the subsequent cup of tea my little bimetal thermometer was showing the temperature right on the boundary between freezing and fridge. Which would be just fine, but then it was time to try my digital probe, shutting the door on the thin cable and hanging the thermometer over the top. I hoped that would put an end to my high-stress fridge obsession! After a few minutes the reading had settled down to 6°C. The probe was near the top of the fridge, and the recognised optimum temperature range for fridges is between 3 and 5 degrees, so all looks fine.

I had a strange stomach ache and bloating this evening, but managed to settle in bed once I had chewed a couple of very out-of-date tummy tablets.

### **Friday 7 September 2018**

My stomach still felt a bit iffy, which made me a bit anxious about driving up to Huddersfield to see Barney in his new student's flat. On the way out I got a bottle of Milk of Magnesia from our local pharmacy but everything seemed to be okay as I drove. It was a pretty horrendous journey up the M1 into the West Yorkshire industrial heartlands (still commemorated in my memory by what Mr Tuttell, deputy head at Latymer, had knocked into my head with a ruler: 'Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield, Wakefield, Dewsbury, Keighley'. I was pretty nervous once we got into the town as I had stalled the engine twice recently and had trouble persuading it to start. I envisaged a repeat here, on a steep hill in heavy traffic, causing major traffic disruption, but all my hill-starts went okay. The Garmin GPS got us across the town, but the route was unkind to the Merc with its silly tech – too many hill starts in heavy traffic. We ended up in a Wickes car park and had to phone Barney, who told us which way to turn when we got out and was waiting to direct us into the car park next to his flat. We had a lovely visit, and he took us to a local West Indian takeaway<sup>7</sup> for our first taste of Jerk Chicken, which was really delicious. All too soon it was time to get home and rescue poor Bailey. The drive out of Huddersfield was easier than the one in, but it was quite a trek back to the M1 and all the way home.

Alistair and the boys arrived towards tea-time, both boys in their new school uniforms – Tom for Juniors and Ewan for secondary. They had both

enjoyed their first weeks in their new schools and seemed pretty unfazed by the experience.

### **Saturday 8 September 2018**

As if new schools weren't enough. The boys were going to meet Heather, Alistair's now-no-longer-secret partner, and her two teenage daughters. Before that, they had to be taken to my barber's shop, to be made respectable! They would be coming back here for the night...

I finally managed to get round to a full set of neck, shoulder and back exercises, once I had oiled by right ear which has been pretty badly waxed up lately.

Then I decided to test my theory that the reason starting the car is difficult after stalling might be a dying key battery. I found my shortcut to the online Owner's Manual and looked up the battery check: press either of the two door controls and a light should appear momentarily. This turned out to be a minute red LED and it lit up perfectly for a fraction of a second, so that was the end of that theory! I am wondering whether I'm just not getting the clutch pedal flat to the floor because I'm rushing to restart the engine after a careless and embarrassing stall (it was dirt in the switch that detects the pressure on the clutch that stopped the car starting altogether and was sorted by the Mercedes Rescue guy months ago). I have tried moving the driver's seat backwards and forwards to ensure that the clutch really is depressed when starting.

### **Monday 10 September 2018**

Today is my late Dad's 117<sup>th</sup> birthday, which makes me feel pretty old.

I had a strange early morning, thanks to a real surprise in the *Fake or Fortune* programme on BBC1 last night – the one where Fiona Bruce and Philip Mould try to help the owners of various artworks to get their authenticity verified. Last night was about what looked to me to be a very crude abstract sculpture by Giacometti – crude because it had been broken and repaired very crudely by the owners. Near the end of the programme, the name S John Woods came up as a previous owner of the piece. He could only be the S John Woods who was my boss at Associated Electrical Industries from about 1963 onwards, and also a very good friend for a good deal longer.

I got up for a pee at something after 4am and was catapulted into wild ride down Memory Lane which kept me pretty well wide awake until I got up at just after 6:30, still reeling from the surprise.

After a mixed but fairly successful career as a fine artist, mostly abstract, and designer of posters, John had been the Design Director at Cunard Lines, responsible for the finer points of design in the company's ocean liners, and had joined AEI – the largest electrical and electronics manufacturer in Europe, which had been formed by the merger of Metropolitan Vickers and British Thompson Houston and the subsequent sucking-in of various other major firms – when massive changes took place at Cunard. He was head of a unit called Design and Publications, part of AEI's Publicity Department. This consisted of a team of graphic designers and artists (two of which, Alan Jackson and Hilary Randall, christened me 'Snake Hips Marsden' as I only weighed about ten stone in

those days!) and another of Technical Sales Promotion Writers (I think the name 'copywriter' was considered too vulgar!) and was based at 33 Grosvenor Place, just across the road from Buckingham Palace's back garden. I joined the writing team in 1963 at the age of 20, after a whole three weeks on the dole, following the takeover of Bennett Cameras by Dixons. I had been paid £650 a year at Bennetts and was offered £850 by John Woods. He was a flamboyant, larger-than-life man who looked nothing like his much younger self as shown in *Fake or Fortune*. His large frame looked good in beautifully tailored suits and pale lilac shirts, always with a bright and beautifully hand-tied bow tie and a bandana handkerchief in his breast pocket – not just for decoration, because when John sneezed and blew his nose it really was needed! His office was made fragrant by his Gauloises *Disque Bleue* cigarettes.

My time at AEI was hugely enjoyable. I got to travel all over the country to report for our magazine that was called (I think) *AEI Engineering*, on the company's contributions to major projects – everything from REX, the reed-electronic exchange developed for BT (or was it still the GPO) to revolutionise the UK's telephone network, to the automation of the National Coal Board's mines. This last was a real adventure, involving two days 3000 feet underground at Bevercotes, the NCB's flagship development pit in North Nottinghamshire (which, amazingly, is only a few miles from where Pat and I live now, as is The Olde Bell Inn, an ancient coaching inn where I stayed!). I did the job with David Hurn, now a very highly respected photographer whom I managed to contact recently after he appeared on TV. The engagement was hard for him because his electronic flash was considered an explosion risk and he had to cart the Board's very heavy spark-proof system underground – but he couldn't remember it.

John's team was a wonderful group of friends and a real pleasure to work with, but when I took over a flat in Hampstead from a colleague who was vacating it I found my static £850 a year insufficient. I was offered a job at an advertising agency in Russell Square at a mind-bending £1250, and John was unable to persuade the firm to match that. However, as he had to use me for freelance work he soon persuaded his boss that it would be more cost-effective to take me back, and I returned for the full £1250.

The job continued to be a joy until GEC launched an aggressive takeover and the entire Publicity Department was dropped. My luck held, because I managed to land a job as Assistant Press Officer at the Industrial Diamond Information Bureau, part of De Beers, and that lasted until I found myself manoeuvred by circumstances into a teacher-training course in Cornwall – and into a cottage belonging to a friend whom I had met through an AEI colleague!

This tall tale is really about John Woods, and it doesn't stop here. I got a letter from Iain Carson, a colleague who had edited the AEI staff newspaper and who had helped with the move to Cornwall in exchange for some of the rather-good furniture I had designed and made for my first house in West Middlesex (but that is *another* story!). The letter asked if I knew that John Woods was living in Camborne, which was so improbable that it almost had to be true. I looked in the phone book and there was the familiar name – and when the phone was answered there was the familiar voice too! The Woodses were actually living in Tuckingmill,

halfway between Camborne and Redruth where we lived. We had a brief reunion, but John and his wife Nancy decided to move 'up country' (as the Cornish say) to Deal because of family pressures. I bought some good furniture from them and they spent their last night in Cornwall in my house before I drove them to Redruth station and waved a last goodbye. We had no more contact, sadly,

I could reminisce about the AEI years, meals in the Woodses' wonderful basement kitchen at 22 Kensington Park Road, Notting Hill, and the visits to the modern jazz club at the Institute for Contemporary Arts just off Piccadilly with John and Nancy, but maybe enough is enough. A Google search told me that John, who was born in 1915, died in 1997 at the age of 82, which is amazing considering his weight, his consumption of fine food and his love of alcohol. I am glad he had a good run.

I managed to get a really clear copy of the picture of John that was shown on the programme, which I had recorded, using my iPhone, in the hope that I could send it to Hilary, the last of my old AEI colleagues with whom I am in touch (just Christmas cards). I couldn't find contact details for her on the Internet, but I have had and used her postal address over the years, so I had to resort to snail mail.

The length of this passage is an indication of how delighted I am to have heard something of a long-lost friend who taught me a great deal about music, good food and life in general.

Getting back to reality, we had a good brisk walk this morning, finishing the usual route in 19 minutes 26 seconds.

Pat went off to Anton's as usual on a Monday but phoned me on the landline later to say that she couldn't get a response on my mobile. I had no record of her calling and it rang normally when I called from the house phone. It seems that Anton's heating, after cooking him alive for ages, has stopped working altogether.

Our boiler engineer arrived at about 11:30 and the service was completed by 12 o'clock.

The Great Fridge Saga reached a really crazy pitch when the guys who came to collect the crummy Indesit refused to take it because it wasn't in protective packaging and they would be liable for any damage. They did, however, agreed to put the bloody thing in the garage until the issue was settled. After several phone calls and emails it was settled, but a new collection couldn't be fitted in until Friday.

### **Wednesday 12 September 2018**

Bailey and I had an extended walk yesterday as I wanted to post the photograph of John Woods to Hilary as soon as possible. We did the extended route in 28 minutes and my feet and I felt pretty good. The day was uneventful apart from my worries about money, and I was relieved after lunch to see that the £600 I had transferred from my MBNA Visa had reached my current account somewhat belatedly, meaning that I shouldn't get charged for an excess overdraft. I am going to need some careful planning, and some serious restraint, to get the shortfall sorted out – but somegaw I managed to spend over £70 in Sainsbury's.

I got up for a pee at 6:13 this morning and got back into bed, wondering if I could treat myself to a bit of a lie-in. Then I thought about all the primary school kids on their scooters and two-wheelers and got up again at 6:30. I had slept well and felt refreshed, and the walk on a fresh (10 degrees) Autumn morning after some rain in the night, was uneventful and quite easy on my feet. We got round in 19 minutes 12 seconds.

My boiling memories of my friendship with John Woods threw up many things I would like to mention in Monday's diary entry, and I thought I might go back and do some edits while Pat was out with Sue today. In the end I found other ways to pass the time.

I just checked: my weight from last Friday at 13½ stone was the lowest it has been since February 2017 when we were on the Fast Diet!

I had made a better chicken curry from the leftovers of Sunday's roast (one of the Co-op's rather good roast-in-a-bag birds) so I opted to finish that – after Pat had taken out a helping for Anton's next food parcel – this evening. I had forgotten the naans under the grill last night so I had to make do with poppadums (?doms?) while she had two smallish jacket potatoes. Tomorrow night will be stir-fried vegetables with noodles and a generous helping of king prawns. We are beginning to take a bit more of an interest in food than we have for quite a while, which can only be good. I don't want to put the weight back on though!

#### **Thursday 13 September 2018**

I got up at 6:40 to a dull morning, rather chilly at 10 degrees. I managed to fit in teeth-cleaning and face-splashing before the 7 o'clock news but had to delay the loo bit until after it, though why I bothered to disrupt my routine with such a load of trivia I really don't know.

We did the usual route in a decent 19 minutes 7 seconds in spite of my left foot feeling rather sore on top. One poo bag, no close encounters and no primary school kids on the Lane, so an easy walk.

The Great Fridge Saga should finally come to an end tomorrow when the Indesit is collected, I have phoned the insurance company to confirm this and my £232 cheque is posted. I got a text this morning confirming collect tomorrow.

I haven't heard back from Hilary in response to my sending her a copy of my S John Woods picture on Tuesday, which is disappointing. I hope she is OK. If I don't get a Christmas card from her I will know she isn't but will have no way of finding out.

As a follow-up to the John Woods stuff I have just googled Alan Jackson, drummer, who was Hilary's boss in the studio at AEI. I found some pictures, one with a long caption:

*'In the late 1960s and early '70s drummer Alan Jackson was one of the key figures in the new waves of British jazz, working and recording regularly with such influential figures as Howard Riley, John Surman and Mike Westbrook. He subsequently scaled down his activities, but since the mid-'90s has enjoyed continuing collaboration with pianist Michael Garrick, featuring on a string of highly praised recordings.'*

This is definitely 'our Al', who was drumming with the Mike Westbrook Band when we went to the ICA with John and Nancy Woods. He was a real



'character', quite uninhibited. I can still remember him seeing a female colleague called Braun and shouting 'Wey-hey, knickers down Mrs Brown!'. Somehow his innate charm allowed him to get away with stuff like this.

I found another mention on the web:

*'I joined Solid Gold Cadillac, Mike's 'jazz rock pop theatrical, extravaganza, and a bloody wonderful time it was!!!  
It was a great learning ground for me as I was working with superb improvisers and performers, the likes of , George Khan, Phil Minton, Malcolm Griffith, Alan Jackson and, of coarse, the man himself, Westy!'*

Mike and 'Westy' were both Mike Westbrook, the band leader. Alan is mentioned, as is Malcolm Griffith (Griffiths?), the trombonist, with whom my girlfriend and later wife Terry, who was with me on visits to the ICA with the Woodses, had been going out before we got together.

Googling around some more, I found mention of The New Quartet in which Alan played drums, with a CD published as recently at 2001 – almost 40 years since I first met him at AEI. Unfortunately I couldn't get any sound out of the Sony stereo system supposedly connected to the PC!

I emailed some of this stuff, including the photograph of John, to my daughter Sarah and suggested she pass it on to her Mum.

This evening, I brought out my long-neglected round-bottomed mild-steel professional wok, bought many years ago when a Chinese supermarket opened in Derby for the princely sum of £4.50, allowing me to bin the flat-bottomed Ken Hom designer wok which I bought when Ken started teaching us all Chinese cookery on TV. I did a big vegetable and noodle stir-fry finished with a pack of lovely plump king prawns for tonight's dinner, and with luck there will be about half left for tomorrow night.

### **Friday 14 September 2018**

My early-morning worry session was about whether one or more of my four pensions would reach the bank soon enough to avoid exceeding my £1000 overdraft allowance. So eager was I to check that I got up at 6:20 and switched the PC on while the kettle was coming to the boil. I logged on to the Smile online banking site as soon as my tea was poured and was hugely relieved to see that my NHS pension (£120.90) had just beaten my State Pension (£656.28) into the bank in the early hours of this morning, halting a long string of red balances (including a four-figure one which I had just managed to return to three before it cost me a penalty charge) with a nice little black one of £67.52. The forecast for the rest of September shows zeroes for my two credit card balances, due for payment on about the 22 September. I know that one card has taken a severe hammering from the £770 cost of the apartment in Norfolk, £560 for the new fridge and the £600 cash transfer. The fridge cost will be offset by the £232 cash settlement from the insurance company, which has cunningly booked the collection of the grotty Indesit for a window between 17:30 and 19:30 this evening, ensuring that I won't be able to tell them that the 'uplift' has been completed until Monday and therefore that I probably won't see their cheque until late next week (whatever happened to modern banking?!). I am habitually OCD about paying off the full balance on each card every month, but I am going to have to break this rule. Minimum payments? And then there is the little matter of

an almost-empty savings account, which I used to keep above £1000 most months. Work to be done, and Christmas isn't far away.

It was a dull morning with a temperature of 11 degrees and my feet were feeling pretty good, so we had a comfortable walk and finished the usual route uneventfully in 19 minutes 43 seconds. Apart from the long route to post my letter to Hilary on Tuesday, the four other walks this week were all completed inside 20 minutes.

My task for the morning was to make some serious sense of the financial situation.

I downloaded the latest statements from MBNA Visa and Sainsbury's MasterCard. The MBNA balance, which includes the holiday and the fridge, is £2373.18 with a minimum repayment of £28.28 payable by the 3 October. The Sainsbury's balance was £452.60 with a minimum repayment of £10.18 payable by the 24 September.

I opened my spreadsheet and did the routine job of creating next month's section: copy September's entries as a block and paste the copy below. Then use find-and-replace to change '/9/' to '/10/' in the date field. Finally edit out any one-off-payments and close up their spaces, and correct the date for my State Pension because it is paid four-weekly. I entered the Sainsbury's payment to the full balance and let Excel calculate the effect. This suggested that I could realistically afford to pay off £500 of the MBNA balance and the whole of the Sainsbury's balance, so I entered these figures and updated the sheet again. I also included a £100 transfer to the savings account at the end of each month, and later on when I had the bank site open I set this up as a monthly standing order, which took no time at all now that the new banking site has been sorted out (it was shambolic at first). With all the known outgoings accounted for, and nothing else spent whatsoever from the current account (which would mean buying absolutely everything on the credit cards!), this would leave a credit balance of just over £800 at the end of October.

I love spreadsheets, particularly when I need to do a bit of financial modelling like this. Change an odd value and the whole sheet updates to show the consequences – or benefits!

But what is it that the old poem says?

*'The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley'* Scots original by Robert Burns, which translates into more modern English as *'The best laid schemes of mice and men go often askew'*.

We will see...

### **Monday 17 September 2018**

The only notable bit of the weekend, apart from Hamilton making fairly light work of winning the Singapore Grand Prix with a perfect drive and weak resistance from Ferrari, was mislaying my MBNA Platinum credit card after shopping at the Co-op. I searched high and low, and even phoned the shop. Eventually, in despair, I sat down in my big leather recliner and for some reason pushed my hand down the left-hand side of the seat cushion, where it encountered – you guessed it! – the missing card. It must have slipped out of the slippery pocket of my Coq Sportif joggers, though why it was in there was a total mystery. Normally, I take

the card out of its slot in my wallet, feed it into the shop's machine and put it straight back in the wallet along with the receipt. Weird – but the scare should encourage me to stick to the normal routine.

I had a thought about the difficulty I sometimes have (which Pat doesn't) in starting the Merc. I remember when I started driving after the ankle fusion (finally got back to that – the reason for starting this diary!), I had to put the instep rather than the ball of the foot on the clutch pedal. I can now use the ball, but maybe I am not getting the pedal right down to the switch (the one the Mercedes Rescue guy cleaned all those months ago). I must make a conscious point of flooring the clutch every time I start the car. Perhaps part of the problem is that the clutch need not be floored for gear changes...

Last night was weird. I woke up with the impression that I had been awake for most of the night but I think I must have dreamt that. When I did wake up it was with a real start on the dot of 6:45 – a little later than I normally get up on weekday mornings. I was quite shocked and shaky for a few minutes but soon got into my usual groove. It was a mild morning and we did the usual walk 20 minutes 48 seconds, in spite of some pain from the left ankle and foot. This had flared up yesterday morning on the way back from the paper shop and started again when we had been walking for about ten minutes. The pain eased, though, and the foot felt reasonable by the time we got home.

I checked and updated the bank-account spreadsheet from the Smile website, and having verified that this month's instalment of my main Teacher's Pension, £890.78, had paid the full statement balance of £452.60 on my Sainsbury's MasterCard – a few days early, but conforming to Friday's master plan.

Pat had gone off to Anton's by the time I got that done, and I was just thinking about coffee when the phone rang and it was Hilary, my old friend from the AEI design studio. She is 80 now, and in good health apart from the usual bone problems. We had a wonderful nostalgia session over the next hour or more. I took down her phone number, but when I looked at my Access address book I found that I already had it.

We did some work outside this afternoon, with Pat weeding and clearing and me bagging up. I filled three large builder's bags and took the first two to the tip followed by the third one. The back of the B-class is pretty roomy, but three bags would have been too much. The good news was that, with concentration on the clutch pedal, I had no trouble starting the engine four times.

With the best use of dust sheets in the back the leaky old bags still made quite a mess, so I spent about half an hour vaccuming the debris out with the heavyweight Sebo vacuum-cleaner. I wish car manufacturers would stop lining them out with that horrible spiky velour: every speck clings tenaciously to it and even a powerful vac struggles to detach them. Pat did her usual of working doggedly on when she really should have stopped, and was still going when I came down from a long shower and shave. By the end of the working day she had filled two more bags!

I hope to be able to cut the grass, which has grown strongly since the drought, tomorrow, but the weather forecast is looking a bit uncertain.

We finished the beef stew for dinner without much enthusiasm and I finished the chocolate cake Pat had made a couple of weeks ago with a large dollop of vanilla ice cream from Kellys of Bodmin.

## **Tuesday 18 September 2018**

I had a decent night's sleep and got up feeling fairly rested at about 6:40. It was a dull and quite windy morning but mild with a temperature of 17 degrees. The usual walk took 20 minutes 5 seconds.

After her obsessive bout of gardening yesterday Pat could barely move this morning. She appeared at about 9am, having taken a very long time to get up, get dressed and get downstairs, and was pretty well immobilised for the rest of the morning.

After breakfast I took the fourth and fifth bags she had filled with garden refuse to the tip, making my effort at cleaning the car after dumping the first three a total waste of time.

With that done I wheeled the Atco motor mower out of the shed, topped it up with petrol and attempted to start it. When I pulled the starting cord I couldn't even get the motor turned over until I remembered to set the throttle to maximum and disengage the clutch. Then it started on the first pull. About half an hour later I had cut the whole patchy, tussocky mess of a lawn, which looked a lot better. Now it needs a generous supply of rain to invigorate it, but none is forecast until about 3am on Thursday, light until about 3pm and then heavy until midnight and light until around 6am on Friday. That is over 24 hours of continuous rain - I just hope the BBC forecast is accurate for once, because all our soil really needs a good drenching!

The sun was quite hot while I was mowing, and the forecast gale was blowing quite vigorously. By the time I had the mower safely back in the shed I was pretty well as knackered as Pat, but between us we had the satisfaction of jobs well done. The wind had dropped enough by 6pm for me to put our blue recycling bin out on the pavement without much risk of it blowing over. More gales are forecast from about 10am to 5pm tomorrow.

Exhaustion left us pretty uninterested in food, so we decided on a nice cold dish of corn-flakes for this evening's 'dinner' instead of the planned faggots and mushy peas!

## **Wednesday 19 September 2018**

I had a long period awake before getting up at 6:20. Today's worry was parking for the meeting about Anton on Monday. It is at Rachael's office which has a car-park on a steep slope, and the problem would be getting the Merc, which was parked nose-down, reversed out without it running forward into the car below. This preoccupied me through most of the meeting, but I managed an improvised reverse hill-start with the stupid electric parking brake – just. I am really not looking forward to a repeat performance on Monday, so I will search thoroughly for a less scary space – preferably one on the level but otherwise one into which I can reverse uphill and which I can leave much more easily without another vehicle right in front of me!

The morning was dull and the ground was damp, suggesting a small amount of rain overnight,, and again the temperature was around 16 degrees. I put my fleece on but was quite sweaty when we got back in 20 minutes 2 seconds. I was surprised not to be suffering too much from the past two days' exertions – though the soles of my feet felt bruised and battered when we set off. I would have to get my nifty little cordless trimmer out later and tidy the edges.

I did this sometime after breakfast, with Bailey following the cutter everywhere in the hope that I would frighten a frog – something he has been hunting a lot recently. After lunch I phoned the Log Man, ordering two big builder's bags of kiln-dried hardwood logs cut to a uniform 10-inch length so that they would fit the doorway of the average woodburning stove. He could have delivered these this coming Friday, but I thought his pickup truck might struggle to share our driveway with the team who will – finally – be replacing the sittingroom bay window. I have to phone again on Monday to arrange a delivery next week.

After lunch I spent an hour tidying the wood shed, dismantling the cantilever parasol and stowing that in the summer house. We decided to leave the round teak table and its surviving five chairs out until after the weekend as we will be entertaining then. Alistair is bringing the boys over as usual for the weekend and Heather and the girls are coming down to join them for Saturday. They have all met now and are keen to get to know one another better.

We had Brain's Faggots for dinner, with some leftover mushy peas which Pat had made last week and some of my generously buttered mash, thanks to the potato ricer which eliminates any lumps (which would put me right off if they were there!). The peas and mash were delicious but the faggots went in the bin – they were soft and slimy and altogether rather disgusting. I will have to try our two favourite butchers – Eatons of Tickhill and the Welbeck Farm Shop, or consult Hugh F-W's massive meat book.

#### **Thursday 20 September 2018**

I had a very restless night, feeling as if I had spent the whole time trying tricks to get me back to sleep, but this was probably an illusion. I checked the time a few minutes later than I normally get up and felt shocked and shattered for a few minutes, but I managed the morning routine well enough. My legs and feet – and particularly the left foot and ankle – felt weary and sore, to the extent that I didn't know whether I would handle the full walk. In the event, I did, getting us round in 22 minutes 9 seconds – two minutes slower than yesterday, but I didn't feel too bad once I was home.

Pat had been planning what to feed everyone and had compiled a pretty huge shopping list. I went off to Sainsbury's and returned almost a hundred pounds lighter! The good news is that since I have started concentrating on keeping the clutch pedal hard down to the floor the engine has started without any hesitation. It seems that the failed ankle fusion was the culprit all along.

This afternoon finally delivered the long-promised heavy rain, which should allow the lawn to reward me for my mowing and trimming efforts. It really did pee down at last!

Pat wanted some photographs on her phone printing, and I had to show her how to send them directly to my email address. I had a very trying session trying to coax the PC into life at all, because it seemed to have decided some maintenance was needed. I got it to optimise the main hard drive eventually but it still didn't seem quite right even after grinding away for a couple of hours. After that I managed to get PhotoShop Elements running and got the ten pictures optimised and trimmed for printing. The results, from our HP PhotoSmart all-in-one printer/scanner/photocopier were very good. There were some worrying hiccups while typing this passage, but the crucial functions were working, more-or-less.

Pat found some cooked smoked haddock in the freezer and made fishcakes with some of the mash, nicely crumbed and fried and served with the rest of the mash and peas. I opened a nice dry white from the Venice region, which was well chilled and went very well with the fishcakes.

Before bed we did a bit of reorganising in the sittingroom in preparation for the window guys who are due tomorrow. It had rained constantly all day.

### **Friday 21 September 2018**

The hiccups are still there this morning, with odd delays between keystrokes and the characters appearing on screen, but at least I can get the diary updated.

I was annoyed not to have received any information from the insurance contractors prior to the window being replaced, particularly as I had got up at 6:20 to be ready for them. I had had a good night's sleep and some strange, vivid but untroubling dreams before getting up, so I felt pretty well rested.

We did the walk very early in 21 minutes 37 seconds, faster than yesterday but slower than the rest of the week. That was satisfying considering the pains and stiffness in my feet, ankles and lower legs.

Getting more fed up with the lack of communication (I have got used to getting SMS updates when waiting for jobs to be done) I phoned the building contractors and was eventually told that the window guys were six minutes away. They arrived even sooner than that and are working busily away as I write this. They finished at around 2pm and the lead guy had a look at our failed kitchen double-glazing units and the conservatory which sprang two spectacular leaks yesterday with a view to quoting for repairs.

Pat has been busy cooking for our wheat-intolerant guest and between us we have done quite a lot of juggling with various gluten-free ingredients. I have been to the Co-op twice for various stuff, but most recently just some cream of tartar to mix with the bicarb I brought back earlier. I had no idea that many brands of baking powder contain wheat flour – scary

for anyone who is seriously intolerant. Corn starch as an alternative is safe but a simple mix of bicarb and tartar is safer.

We are taking Alistair and his gang out for dinner at one of our better pubs tomorrow, and just hope they serve safe stuff.

He and the boys arrived at about 5:30pm.

### **Monday 24 September 2018**

I had a decent night but a very disturbed early morning and got up at 6:35 feeling quite groggy. I wish I knew what causes this horrible feeling.

Saturday went very well for the most part, except that 'one of our better pubs', which is used regularly by some of our closest friends turned out to be profoundly disappointing. We were shown to our reserved table and abandoned. There were menus on the table so we sat for ages expecting to have our orders taken. It turned out that we had to order both drinks and food at the bar. The young woman who took out orders must have been a new trainee, because she didn't have a clue how to deal with the till and eventually she had to be directed by a manager. We were given empty glasses for the soft drinks which we had to fill at a machine (which at least meant unlimited refills!) with only my pint of bitter bitter being served at the bar. Desserts had to be ordered and collected at the bar, too, and the food was 'decidedly average'. It seems that our friends go only because another friend of theirs seems to have access to an unlimited supply of gift vouchers.

We had a chance to get to know Alistair's new family, who had dog- and house-minded when we were in Norfolk, really well.

Pat had to do the Monday Anton bit yesterday because she had a meeting with his social worker and care manager in Sheffield today. That chopped Sunday into bits.

The drive to The Quadrant, on the Parkway Business Park, where Rachael's firm has its office was pretty tedious. We got onto the M1 northbound from the A57 and were very soon on the tail of a long, slow tailback from the Sheffield Parkway junction. Luckily we had allowed plenty of time for the drive and got to our destination on the stroke of 10. The meeting was quite fruitful, though with no real solution to Anton's many problems. The good news was that we were well on our way back to the M1 by midday, so we diverted to Catcliffe and had a splendid fish-and-chip lunch at Whitby's.

Social Services had emailed the record of the meeting to Pat by the end of the day, but we would need to phone for a password to read this as it is set up to protect any confidential information about the subject (in this case Anton).

The rest of the afternoon was deliberately lazy as the meeting had been pretty tiring. Towards 5pm I remembered to ring our log man to book the delivery of two large builder's bags of what should be really good 10-inch long kiln-dried hardwood logs. This will happen on Thursday, and the delivery guy will ring first thing to tell us when he will be with us. I need to get to the ATM to draw £75 from each of my two credit cards. This will pay the £130 for the logs and leave me a bit of surplus.

Once the logs arrive I will be in for some more serious exercise, loading them into our builder's barrow, wheeling them down the side of the house and round to the wood shed – quite a challenging manoeuvre, particularly if I overload the barrow. Then they will need to be stacked tidily in the shed. At least I have two more days to get into condition before they arrive!

I am seeing my orthopaedic surgeon or one of his juniors next Monday. My legs and feet (and arms, shoulders and back) may not be in the best of condition after the log-stacking.

## **Tuesday 25 September 2018**

I was very tired when I got to bed last night, so when I woke up for a pee at 6:20 this morning I decided to treat myself to a lie-in. I was amazed, and delighted, when wakened by Bailey barking, to see that I had slept for another two hours!

The temperature was a miserly four degrees, with a sharp wind, so I tried to walk pretty, in spite of sore feet and ankles. We completed the lap in a disappointing 22 minutes 47 seconds.

Pat phoned for the password needed to access the report of yesterday's meeting, and I downloaded and printed it for her, leaving a shortcut on her desktop in case she needed another copy.

The PC was misbehaving badly this morning. Even the simple task of accepting my typing of the diary seemed to defeat it, as the input was ignored for several seconds and then suddenly appeared. I am becoming more and more sure that this machine (or its blasted *Windows 10* operating system) is terminally ill! I would give anything to restore it to *Windows 7*. I have spent a lot of time this afternoon trying to find out how to do this, and discovered that I have my original *Windows 7 Ultimate Edition* DVD and the Repair Disc I created when I installed it. I have looked at various forums for guidance, but can find nothing 'official' from Microsoft themselves, and to be honest I haven't got the courage to try the downgrade. This is pretty gutless, because I only have a few outside software packages, for which I have the original CDs or backups (*MS Office Professional 2003*, *Xara X* (a brilliant old vector drawing system) and *Adobe PhotoShop Elements 2.0*, which allows me to make the very best of photographs. The others, such as *OpenOffice*, I can find on the Internet, so if I could restore *Windows 7* I would be quite confident about installing those. I am concerned, though, that if I screw anything up irrevocably – like email accounts – I will leave Pat without a useful computer. In the 'old' days I would have gone charging in without a moment's hesitation, but I think I'm beginning to show my age! I think I will ring Chris Guest, the freelance computer guy who sorted us out once before. We need a new C-drive because the current one has a miserable capacity of only 68.2GB, of which just 8.22GB is free. I think one terabyte (1000GB) would be more in keeping with modern trends.

I have been getting missed-call notifications on my phone, and voicemails from people failing to contact me. I tried phoning the mobile from the landline and got BT messages saying that my mobile number had not been recognised or had not responded and was switching to voicemail. Remembering the old remedy for all things electronic, I switched the



phone off, let it rest for a while and then turned it on again. After one failure, it rang when called from the landline and made outgoing calls successfully too. Perhaps it had somehow lost contact with the server and switching it on had made it reinitialise...? I thought I might start switching it off for the night every night, with the charger connected, and on again so it gets a reset as soon as I get up, but that risked missing important calls.

### **Wednesday 26 September 2018**

Following yesterday's planning I switched the phone off as soon as I got downstairs, switched it on again and called it from the landline. It worked perfectly, but I think I need to keep an eye on the signal strength.

The temperature was a cosy 12 degrees after yesterday's four, but there was a sharp south-westerly wind which encouraged us to walk quickly, getting round in 20 minutes 21 seconds. My eyes were spared the intense low sun when walking east, with a heavy bank of almost-black cloud hanging low in the eastern sky and only a glimpse of sun below it.

The tasks for today were to get the cash to pay the £130 for the logs which, I hope, will be delivered tomorrow and to rake the gravel level in the wood shed, ready for stacking them.

These jobs were done, along with the mammoth task of getting rid of a huge mass of windfall apples and general autumn garden debris, before lunch. I needed to buy some toothpaste so I walked over to the OneStop shop and used the ATM to draw £150 cash on my MBNA Platinum Visa credit card.

The £232 cheque from the insurance company arrived in the late morning post. I completed a paying-in slip and put this with the cheque in a Smile Post Office deposit envelope, but I couldn't finish the job as Wednesday is early closing day at our main post office and I had missed the 1pm closing time.

I was pretty weary after a few more odd jobs and was glad to reach 4pm for our afternoon tea and biscuits.

### **Thursday 27 September 2018**

My pattern of lying awake for several hours worrying about whatever is the matter of most concern and struggling with my varying relaxation tricks in the vain hope of getting back to sleep seems to have been broken at last. My bladder had me up at least three times during the early morning, and it was still quite dark on the last visit. I was really surprised to see that it was 6:20am when I got back to bed and decided that it was time to get up. The groggy feeling was absent.

We had an uneventful walk, completing the lap in 20 minutes 46 seconds, slower than Monday and Wednesday but faster than Tuesday. My feet felt reasonably comfortable all the way round, which was a relief as I would need them in good condition to barrow the logs round to the wood shed!

It was a dull morning, mild at 14 degrees with a forecast of sunshine later. I wanted to get the D&G cheque to the Post Office as soon as possible, just for the satisfaction of knowing it would be on the way to the bank, but I needed to be ready for a phone-call to tell me the log man is on his way and needed to move the car to create the maximum amount of space

for his lorry, allowing him to drop the bags of logs as close to the side gate as possible.

I got fed up of waiting to hear from the delivery fellow, so I texted Craig the Log Man and he called back immediately offering 3:30pm as a target time. This was fine, leaving me time to drive down to the Post Office to deposit the cheque (and buy a book of first-class stamps as the huge store of recovered ones given to us by Aidan's ex was finally running out). On the way home I stopped at the OneStop for milk and the pharmacy to check if they had any unclaimed prescriptions for us, which they didn't apart from my eye-drops which are out of sync with the others.

Back home, I got the morning's coffee and biscuits ready and then helped Pat to understand how to order repeat prescriptions online from our GP practice. I also had to sort out an email she was having trouble sending before I went out to prepare the ground for the log delivery. I moved the green and blue wheelie-bins from their place at the corner of the path between the side gate and the garden so that I would be able to steer a loaded barrow round the corner. Then I fetched the builder's barrow up from the bottom of the garden and parked it just inside the side gate to the driveway with a rigger's glove on each handlebar. I moved the lawn rake and three brooms from where they had been parked, leaving a clear run from the driveway to the wood-shed.

I had intended to park the car tight up against the wall in front of the garage, but in the end I moved it as far up the driveway as possible, leaving a large open area into which the lorry can be reversed to drop the bags of logs close to the front of the house.

All I could do at this stage was to wait, which proved to be longer than expected. A member of the firm phoned to say that the delivery guy had had to go to Derby and was on his way back. I am writing this at four minutes to five and he still hasn't arrived.

It was nearer six when the very long flatbed lorry arrived. The driver managed to back it in and get fairly close to my target area. Between us we dragged the two incredibly full bags off and closer to the side gate. All the logs were of the same wood, which had a lovely resinous smell so I guess it is a softwood. I managed to get about six barrow-loads round to the back and dumped into the wood shed before tying the bags up and stopping for the day. I will stack the firstlogs before bringing any more round tomorrow morning.

I was surprisingly pain-free after all this, but we will see how I am in the morning...

### **Friday 28 September 2018**

I was awake at 6am after only two visits to the loo, my way lit by a beautifully bright full moon in a clear sky ornamented by the great constellation of Orion the Hunter.

The moon was clearly visible in the blue sky when I got up at 6:30, and it was actually just off-full. The temperature was 8 degrees, and I could see it all the way round the walk. I forgot to stop the watch so I estimated our time at 21 minutes.

I didn't feel too bad for yesterday's exertions and was quite looking forward to continuing!

After breakfast I went out and stacked the logs I had piled up in the middle of the wood shed along two walls. This involved a lot of bending down as I had dumped the logs on the gravel floor. Once these were clear, I brought the first of three barrows round from the first bag and continued to try to keep the stacks stable and tidy.

By 10:30am I had dealt with three barrowfuls and was ready for coffee. The labour went on until about 1pm, at which point all the logs were stacked along the short and longer walls of the wood shed. The short-wall stack was two deep and every log from the two bags had been fairly tidily stowed. My lower back was very painful and I felt as if I had been boiled, even on this quite cool morning, which had started at less than ten degrees and by 1pm had just reached fourteen in bright sunshine.

Once everything was tidied we had lunch, and then I went upstairs for a much-needed shower. I felt sleepy and dropped off once or twice while reading.

Just after 6pm I checked the bank website and was amazed to see that the insurance company's cheque, which I deposited via the Post Office yesterday, had reached my account.

### **Saturday 29 September 2018**

We had a good long lie-in this morning, with Pat getting up first sometime after 9am to make tea and bring it back to bed. I had logged six night-time trips to the loo, perhaps because my bedtime milk had been rather generous. The bottle had been almost empty and it made sense for me to finish it, filling a 250ml glass. I had slept well between loo-trips and felt reasonably rested. My back and other bits, which had taken a hammering with the logs, felt surprisingly comfortable.

My main priority for the day was to avoid news bulletins as Channel Four's coverage of the Russian Grand Prix would be delayed highlights, hitting our screen at about 4:30pm.

We brought our orange, lemon and olive trees into the conservatory – a heavy-lifting job which my back and other bits handled fairly well after yesterday's log-humping.

I kept going back to enjoy looking at my lovely neat log stacks in the wood-shed. In between, I took a broom out front and swept the sawdust and wood chips off the driveway.

### **Monday 1 October 2018**

Yesterday was an ordinary Sunday. I cooked fried salmon fillets with new potatoes and frozen peas for dinner.

I have been having increased problems with my urinary tract. I have logged quite a few nights when I have had to get up six times, which had been playing hell with my sleep patterns, particularly when there are major worries lurking which seem to jump in and take advantage of my unscheduled waking and then keep me awake sometimes for several hours. I also get the urge to pee very suddenly several times during the day. Peeing is quite painful – more of an ache than a sting – and the same

pain comes when I have an urgent need to pee. I decided that it would be a bit of a challenge to get to Derby for my annual review with Mr Milner – at least an hour each way in the car, a lot of sitting around in the hospital and probably interruptions while I am being seen. I dialled the hospital's appointment line two minutes after it was supposed to open at 9am, and it was already engaged. It still was 15 minutes later.

I had assumed that this was the general appointments line, and went on the website to see if I could call Trauma and Orthopaedics directly, but it turned out that the number had had been calling *was* Trauma and Orthopaedics! I got through at about 9:15 and had no trouble switching my appointment to the 19 November at 3:20pm.

Before nine o'clock morning I put in a request to our practice's online AskMyGP service and should get a call back fairly soon. Then I tried the hospital's appointments line two minutes after it was due to open at 9am, but it was already engaged!

At 9:35 I had a call back from one of the nurse-practitioners to talk about the urinary problem. He asked me to take a urine specimen to the surgery this morning and outlined the tests he might want to do including a PSA (prostate-specific antigen) blood test. Luckily we had a couple of specimen bottles in the bathroom cabinet and I was ready for a pee, which looked as clear as a good white wine! I delivered the bottle and was home a couple of minutes before 10am.

I had a call back later saying there was no obvious infection but there were traces of blood in my urine specimen.

The aspect of my health which is worrying me most is my vision. The cloudy floaters which drift back and forward across my field of view are causing more trouble now than they ever have. Jobs like peeling potatoes and reading small instructions on food package and the computer screen are becoming more and more difficult because of these *and* the sticky tears that coat my eyeballs. I assume that the hospital doctor who prescribed the drops I now use every day had spotted this, but they don't seem to be helping much. I hope that my appointment at Bassetlaw Hospital on Wednesday will be, as I have requested, with Mr Dinakaran, the consultant who sent me for a brain scan.

Nothing much to report for the rest of the day. Pat came back from Anton's after a better-than-usual visit and we had a simple plate of linguine for dinner.

## **Tuesday 2 October 2018**

I woke up for a pee after daybreak, looked at the time on the phone handset on my bedside table by just holding my glasses up and read the time as about 4:30. I was shocked, when I actually put my glasses *on* and looked at the digital clock/radio, to see that the time was actually around *six*-thirty – time to get up and walk the dog. I was genuinely distressed as I felt very sleepy, and after a pee – only the second since coming to bed! – I got back into bed and had an argument with myself which was eventually resolved by getting up shortly before 7am. It seemed that I had slept very well and I really wasn't eager to stop.

By the time I slipped into my usual routine I was feeling a bit more organised mentally, and we did the usual walk – though my left foot was fairly painful – in 22 minutes 37 seconds.

The main tasks for the day were to collect a blood-test request letter from the surgery to take to the hospital tomorrow afternoon when I will be there for my Ophthalmology appointment and can drop into the super-fast phlebotomy suite. The results will be sent back to the GP in the hope of shedding some light on my urinary troubles and anything else that might be falling apart. I also needed to call at the pharmacy after 2pm to pick up both our prescriptions.

Before all that I went to Sainsbury's and spent almost a hundred pounds on food for us and the dog.

Dinner was going to be a lazy one: fish fingers, air-fried chips and frozen peas. Later in the week there will be chicken wings and wedges, after a long break from what had become an established routine for quite a long period.

### **Wednesday 3 October 2018**

I had a fairly good night and it was after 6:45 when I was awake enough to check the time. I made it downstairs just in time for the 7 o'clock news on Radio 4. The morning was dull but mild with the temperature at about 14 degrees, and we did the walk in 21 minutes 55 seconds.

I have my ophthalmology appointment this afternoon at 2:20, and I need to get my blood taken either before or after that. Pat will be on chauffeur duty because my dilation drops won't wear off until quite late. I have to decide whether to go early for the test or risk waiting until I escape from the clinic, hoping I will have time for the test before the phlebotomy unit closes at 5pm. I think before will be best, getting to the hospital at around 1:30, which will give me 50 minutes to get the bloods done and sign in at Outpatients, which can now be done by letting their computer scan the appointment letter – amazing!

With deliveries for both of us scheduled for today I suggested that Pat drops me off at the hospital and comes straight home. I can then park myself in the cafeteria and phone her for a lift home. I don't know why we have got into the habit of her coming and waiting with me all afternoon! I have the Kindle app on my phone and am well into a Karin Slaughter thriller, so I won't die of boredom. Whether I can read the text once the dilating drops have got a grip, I'm not sure, but I can easily enlarge the text. There is also a waiting room TV with subtitles...

When I tried to shut the PC down or sign out and log Pat in, the task button refused to do anything. That's a new piece of Windows 10 idiocy! Better try CTRL-ALT-DEL!

The plan worked well. I was at the hospital around two hours before my ophthalmology appointment and had the blood samples taken in a few minutes. I logged in at Outpatients by scanning my appointment letter and answering a few easy questions on the screen. I was kept busy with batteries of tests and eventually got in to see my consultant, Mr Dinakaran at about 3pm. He had a good look into my eyes, which were still dilated thanks to the drops and gave me a reasonably encouraging

report. The cataracts are growing slowly, but not yet enough to be a big problem. He could see the floaters and agreed that they had grown and multiplied, but put down some of my problems to not having gone back for another test of my ageing eyes a year after the last one. So – nothing dramatic to worry about, even if my vision is deteriorating rather quickly.

I sent Pat a text when I had had a pee (the only one since leaving home!) and left the clinic, and she picked me up at the main entrance about 15 minutes later.

I had managed to read fairly well using the Kindle app on my iPhone in spite of the dilating drops, but my view of the world was a bit difficult to interpret. Everything looked very bright and quite blurred even after 5pm. I doubt if my vision will return to normal (or what passes for normal) until morning.

I will ring to book an eye-test in the morning.

### **Thursday 4 October 2018**

After another good night's sleep I snapped awake at 6:55am and managed to get downstairs in time to catch the 7 o'clock pips (I love to watch the second-hand on my amazing Casio watch click onto the 12 mark as the last and longest beep sounds. It's silly, I know, but I paid for a perfectly accurate timepiece and I got one – it even lets me see that the countdown clocks on the BBC News Channels are almost invariably three or four seconds slow!

After breakfast I went onto the SpecSavers website for the phone number and discovered that I could book an NHS eye test online, choosing an appointment from the on-screen list. I booked on for 10:10 tomorrow morning very easily. I hope some new lenses will improve my vision and maybe allow me to pay less attention to the clouds of floaters.

Beyond that, neither of us got very much done before lunch. We decided to find a movie on *Amazon Prime* to watch during and after our cheese-on-toast lunch. Of the hundreds on offer Steven Spielberg's epic *The Post* about the battle the American papers had to publish the truth about the Vietnam War caught our eyes and kept us occupied until about 3pm.

Wings, wedges and a Magnum (a real one rather than an excellent Aldi imitation) were on the agenda for dinner tonight. They went down very well after a long absence.

### **Friday 5 October 2018**

A nice lazy start this morning after a longish lie-in: I got up at 6:50, got dressed and just caught the 7 o'clock news on Radio 4. We had a nice easy walk in a temperature of around 17 degrees – apart from keeping Bailey and a very grumpy little Staffie apart, and finished the lap in 22 minutes 21 seconds.

I got into town with plenty of time for my eye test, and for a change this was handled by a very pleasant female optician. My prescription has changed quite a lot and the new glasses will be ready at 10am next Friday. I hope I find them helpful.

I went to Aldi on the way back, mainly to get croissants, which the boys really like, and the slightly sparkling mineral water flavoured with

elderflower which Pat likes even more. Once back and unloaded I went up to our village Co-op and was appalled to discover that the shop is to be reduced in size by a third. All the merchandise had been moved, or temporarily removed from the shop, so it was almost impossible to find the things I wanted. I am really angry about the plan, for myself but more for our fellow villagers. We are fit and mobile and can get to Asda, Aldi, Tesco, Sainsbury's and Morrisons in a matter of minutes, but there are people without transport who will have a lot more trouble shopping.

Alistair and the boys arrived at around dusk and we cobbled together a meal based round a telephone order to Domino's. The pizza were excellent, but the boys asked for chips from our local takeaway because they were better than Dominos', but when I had gone across the road and waited quite a while for them we thought the shop had let itself down – they were hard and rather overcooked. The pizzas were the best any of us had tasted for a long time, but were murderously expensive.

### **Saturday 6 October 2018**

Alistair and the boys had arranged to meet Heather and her girls up in the South Yorkshire hills for lunch at an ice-cream parlour and café. I watched the qualifying for the Japan Grand Prix (great work again, Lewis and Mercedes!) and had just been up to our mangled Co-op for stuff for our dinner tomorrow night when Heather texted to say Tom had asked if she and the girls could come back here with them, so immediate adjustments had to be made to our plans. We had been intending to have hot dogs and burgers and I had bought the necessary rolls, but of course they weren't gluten-free. I also found that our favourite Herta frankfurters contain 'wheat fibre', so nor are they. I doubted that burgers from our favourite butcher at Retford farmers' market would contain anything but beef, but I had no way of knowing for sure. As it turned out, nobody wanted to eat anything much after the ice-cream parlour!

### **Monday 10 October 2018**

Sunday was a good day for me, with a brilliant result in the Japanese Grand Prix: Hamilton won with his team-mate second, the two Red Bulls were third and fourth and Ferrari fifth and sixth with Vettel behind *his* team-mate.

Afterwards I did a full Sunday roast – chicken and all the trimmings.

I had a decent night's sleep and had no trouble getting up before 7am this morning. It was a pleasant morning, and much warmer (around 12 degrees) than yesterday when we had quite a hard frost. Our walk went well and we finished in 21 minutes 53 seconds. The usual Monday routine has been tipped on its head with Pat taking Anton to the doctor at about 3:30pm.

As it turned out, Anton refused to see the doctor, so Pat had a lot of wasted time added to her normal Monday visit. She ended up emailing two of the care team and leaving it to them to sort things out – which would make a nice change.

### **Tuesday 11 October 2018**

I was reluctant to wake up fully, let alone *get* up, when the clock passed 6:30 this morning. Maybe it is the shortening days and the lengthening

nights clashing with my body clock. I rolled over to enjoy the sensation of being cuddled by our 'pure white Russian goose down' duvet, which is especially luxurious since I put the 4.5-tog summer quilt in with the 9.5-tog spring/autumn one, giving us the full 13 togs for winter. After arguing with myself for a while I decided to get up at 6:55 and see if the streets were still free of primary-school kids on two-wheelers.

They were, right to the end of our 21-minute 46-second walk, though the 'big kids' heading for their school bus were out in force. We had an uneventful walk in a surprising temperature of 14 degrees (after 1 degree on Saturday!).

The next bit of winter preparation will be to get the log baskets out of the summer-house and give them a dust before stashing them in the garage. We should be getting a reminder call from the chimney-sweep fairly soon, after which we will be able to light the fire when we want.

We did a bit of clothes shopping at The Original Factory Shop later with Pat buying for the boys and me trying to find polo shirts in black or navy which wouldn't show grease spots so badly (I keep promising to put on an apron before cooking and I almost always forget!).

On the way back we called in at what is left of our village Co-op and bought some dog food and some demi-baguettes for lunch. I filled mine with finely cut chicken mixed with mayonnaise.

I had a crisis with *PhotoShop Elements* later when trying to process some pictures sent from Pat's phone. I could do the necessary cropping and other processes but the stupid program refused to save the results, blaming this on 'a program error'. I wasted ages deleting the package, trying out an open-source (free) picture editor which baffled me completely and doing a clean reinstall of the Adobe package which came back with the same stupid error! It looks as if I will be able to process and print each picture once and then will have to discard it.

### **Wednesday 12 October 2018**

I had a long spell of wakeful rest this morning, with my mind at ease and the body feeling more-or-less pain-free with all muscles very relaxed. I got up at 6:50 and managed to get dressed, mash tea and do my bathroom stuff in time to hear the start of the 7 o'clock news.

It was much cooler than yesterday at the same time, with the two weather apps arguing between 8 and 9 degrees, but I decided not to put a sweater under my fleece. We had an easy walk, meeting one excitable young spaniel and getting round in 21 minutes 42 seconds.

After breakfast I went back to the *PhotoShop* problem and at least managed to print half a dozen nice family pictures for Pat, though I couldn't save most of the processed versions of them. I have been preparing photogreaphs for printiung for years and have always saved the finished versions, so this really is frustrating. Even more irritating is the fact that one or two of the pictures *did* save OK!!!

Later in the morning, with the bright sun shining on the rather tufty grass and at least some of the heavy dew drying, I got the petrol mower out and cut the areas where the grass was the least wet. When I had done the driest areas we had a cup or tean and a sandwich each, with crisps, and I



went back out to finish the job. The grass looked a lot less tussocky when I had finished, and was beautifully green. By the time I had finished I had worked up a generous sweat. Meanwhile, Pat had started cutting back the clematis and ivy on the pergola, generating vast amounts of garden refuse.

She had already filled one of the two bags that the logs came in and it was definitely too heavy for me to take to the tip. I fetched the other bag and split the load. There was also a large green plastic trug with ordinary looking cuttings on top but which I could barely lift. I fetched the other log bag and split the contents from the other one into two. Then I fetched the barrow and just managed to lift the trug into it – it was mostly full of soil and roots with soil attached. I rolled it back down the garden and tipped the contents onto the unofficial compost heap outside the shed. The two big bags will go to the tip tomorrow morning, probably on the way home from my planned hair-and-beard cut – or maybe not, as a long spell of light rain is forecast from midday

I dug our sweep's last certificate of sweeping from last year out of the filing cabinet. It shows that we are due to be done towards the end of October. It was a bit late to phone, so I will call him tomorrow morning. Once he has done his bit, we can get some logs in beside the fireplace. The idea of a log fire seems a bit premature at the moment, though, with the temperature in the low twenties!

I need to contact my man Steve to talk about trimming our trees soon.

Two huge bags of garden refuse and two smaller ones went to the tip this morning and when I got back I gave the car boot a thorough vacuuming. Then I sent a rather peevish email to the insurance company's builders, who haven't yet replied to one I sent them exactly a month ago. Time to stir the insurance company up, I thought and emailed them too. I helped Pat to fill some more big bags of garden rubbish and then tried various tricks to get the long bolt out of the drive gates so I could straighten it. I got it out, got it in the vice – and still couldn't shift it!

### **Monday 15 October 2018**

Friday morning was very windy, with what the forecasters sometimes call 'spits and spots' of rain, but Bailey and I managed the walk in 21½ minutes. The weekend was uneventful until Sunday lunchtime, when we went over to Aidan's for 'snacks' that turned out to be a main meal. Doni's Mum is over on a visit from Bulgaria, so we had our first chance to meet her – a very cheerful lady, but with no English. We invited them all to come over this evening for a meal – a generous but impulsive move by Pat, which would have been better tomorrow when the weekly visit to Anton would be behind her. Because of her decision she was down much earlier than usual and making pastry before breakfast.

I got up for my fifth pee of the night at 6:15 and decided not to bother going back to bed, so the count was only four. It was pitch dark when I got downstairs, with very little daylight showing when we were ready to go out. It was raining gently with a temperature of eight degrees when I opened the door, but the rain eased during our 22 minute 44 second walk. There wasn't a sign of pesky kids on bikes that early!

I did a bit of skivvying for Pat before she went out, and put various lovely things bought at Welbeck on Saturday morning, bagged, in the freezer.

I used to use [paul@paul-marsden.com](mailto:paul@paul-marsden.com) as my main email address but it became such a spam-trap that I disabled it and used only [paul@paul-marsden.co.uk](mailto:paul@paul-marsden.co.uk). Recently I have found the .com address attached to all sorts of stuff like Microsoft subscriptions and realised that a lot of possibly important emails might be getting lost, so this morning I reactivated the .com address with a forward to the .co.uk one rather than a separate mailbox.

We will see what comes in...

That done, I emptied the kitchen bin and the office wastepaper basket, then emptied and cleaned the little Vax cleaner so I could give the whole downstairs a gentle vaccing (the Sebo really is getting a bit heavy for me!).

I then peeled something over a kilo of potatoes for the topping of the steak pie Pat is cooking from a Marty Berry recipe for tonight's dinner.

I had just sat down with a cup of coffee when the phone rang. It was a very worried Pat telling me that the car had developed a problem when she was a bit over halfway to Anton's. Apparently smoke was coming from under the bonnet and the display was showing a variety of warning messages about the clutch. She waited a while and then managed to drive to Anton's, saying she will get away as soon as possible and try to get home. We have the Mercedes Rescue service and she has the contact I set up on her phone, so we were hoping for the best.

The weird thing was that she drove home from Anton's (about a 40-minute drive) without problems. I need to get out and see what the car feels like for myself...

The afternoon was a frenzy of cooking which left both of us pretty weary, but the evening with Aidan, Doni and her mother was very pleasant, keeping Doni busy with interpreting as her Mum has no English at all.

## **Tuesday 16 October 2018**

I was restless for quite a while before it was time to get up. The walk took 24 minutes 46 seconds because of a particularly complicated poo bag episode, thanks to Bailey spreading one poo over three different locations.

When we got back I set the table for breakfast, unloaded the very full dishwasher and refilled my 28-day pill dispenser. With all this done, plus writing this entry, there was still total silence from upstairs. The floorboards didn't start creaking until just before 9am – a very well-earned rest for Chef Pat!

I will took the car for a fairly long run after breakfast. It seemed to be behaving well, though I thought I could detect some roughness in the clutch when taking up the drive. No smoke, though!

We were both pretty shattered after our heavy cooking day, and couldn't face leftovers from Monday's lovely dinner. I had two fried eggs on toast and Pat had one boiled one with toast soldiers, both with a cup of tea!

When I stood up to head for bed my left foot was horribly painful and I couldn't walk for about a minute. This is the usual pattern of it stiffening

with inactivity, but this time the pain was particularly bad. It eased enough for me to struggle up the spiral staircase and into bed.

### **Wednesday 17 October 2018**

I got up for a pee at 5:15am and got back to sleep fairly quickly afterwards. I woke again at about 6:20 and argued with myself about when to get up. In the end my bladder made the decision with a sudden, rather painful demand for relief.

It was a rather dull morning with a temperature of 11 degrees. I had a struggle again with the stiffened foot, but decided to try a walk. After about 7 minutes of pain in the top of the left foot and up the lower shin, I decided enough was enough and turned round. We got home in just 15 minutes.

I have been trying to remember the timings for our (or George's and my) walks over the past few years. When we were doing the old route, we met kids being taken to the primary school further from us, but never had problems with bikes and scooters. I am wondering about changing to a winter schedule, which wouldn't be a major problem as Pat usually gets up no earlier than 8:30 and often nearer 9:00. Looking back at diary entries a couple of years ago it seems that I was already in the habit of getting up at between 6:30 and 6:45 then, like today.

I wasn't sure how well I would manage the weekly wrestle with our fitted sheets and the fortnightly one with the duvet, but I did, and vacuumed the carpet before having a much-needed shower and shave.

Later on I got the log baskets and fire-irons out of the summer house, but when I mentioned to Pat that our chimney sweep had booked us in for the 22 November, and she was not impressed. I put the accessories in the garage and emailed three sweeps from the website our guy has given me to see if one of them could do our sweeping sooner.

I had tried splitting one or two logs from the batch we had delivered a few weeks ago, but they had resisted my mighty felling axe. I had another go and the logs split fairly easily. Maybe they had benefited from being out in our open shed for a few weeks. I should have no trouble getting some good kindling into each basket.

I have been having problems with wax in my right ear, and have been dripping olive oil into it several times a day. This morning, for the first time, this seems to have helped, giving me more high-frequency hearing on the right side than I have had for ages. I might still book myself in at the surgery for syringing.

So far I have only received a couple of emails which had been addressed to my reinstated .com address and forwarded to the .co.uk one. Neither was at all important.

We had a substantial meal of leftovers from Sunday evening's meal and managed to enjoy it.

Early in the evening I got a text from a sweep who had been alerted by one of those whom I had emailed. He said that he would come next Monday morning! We had a few exchanges and he assured me that he could fix the door seal and cement round where the cast-iron flue goes through the top of the fireplace recess. Sounding good, but I won't tell our

regular guy to cancel our appointment until after the new one has finished.

With a clear blue sky and brilliant sunshine all morning, the temperature hadn't managed to climb past 11 degrees by midday, with an afternoon maximum of only 13 degrees forecast by the BBC Weather app. After the drought and heat-wave which went on far longer than expected, it seems that the weather is settling down to more seasonal norms.

We had to go out at around 12:30 to get some of Pat's blood tested at Bassetlaw Hospital and flu jabs for both of us at our GP practice.

### **Thursday 18 October 2018**

My early morning sleep pattern seems to be getting more and more confused. I usually go to the loo at around 5am but sometimes nearer 4am, and from then on I am never sure whether or not I have got back to sleep. I don't get anxious about this – or about any of the other things I might reasonably brood on – and don't bother with my counting-backwards or my silent singing, and I am usually driven to the loo again when it is about time to get up – 6:30am.

While it was still dark, the vast constellation of Orion was clearly visible out of our south-facing *en-suite* window. A crystal-clear sky, so it was going to be cold, and the iPhone weather app confirmed this with a local reading of six degrees. I put my heaviest sweatshirt on under my favourite fleece, and was quite comfortable without gloves.

The left foot was painful, though not quite as much as yesterday, so I managed the whole circuit, but in a pretty miserable 23 minutes 12 seconds (last week's average was 21 minutes 43 seconds). I didn't feel at all chilled and the pain eased quickly when I sat down to write this entry.

We went to the hospital for Pat's blood tests and then to the nearby community centre for our flu jabs. After that, we had a really lazy day. At one point my mobile rang in my trouser pocket and woke me from a deep sleep in my armchair. Following the pattern I described earlier, I have felt pretty shattered all day. Amazon were offering a book that claims to offer a genuine solution to insomnia, so I bought it for the Kindles.

Thanks to my emailing efforts, we have a sweep, also called Paul, coming on Monday morning.

Dinner was a portion each of M&S seafood linguine – very nice.

### **Friday 19 October 2018**

I got a reasonable night's sleep but was still awake at around 5am. I was relaxed, though, and didn't try to force myself back to sleep. The bladder took over at 6:35 so I got up.

It was a lovely Autumn morning with a temperature of just 3 degrees. The air was very dry, so I didn't really feel the cold – the gloves stayed in my pocket – and we did the walk in 21 minutes 48 seconds with only very moderate pain in the left foot and ankle allowing me to keep up a brisk pace. My first pair of HiTec walking shoes is beginning to come apart, so I will have to try some Evo Stik today. If that fails I'll have to get another pair for best and demote the current 'best' pair to walking and everyday wear. When I looked carefully at the shoes I decided that they were totally

beyond repair. I salvaged the laces and consigned the shoes to the green bin.

I switched the central heating onto its 'ALL DAY' setting before breakfast. Alistair and the boys arrived towards tea time. I had gone out to the Co-op to buy pizzas as we were pretty annoyed with the quality at our local takeaway and with the high cost at Domino's. We had them with oven French fries and they were just as good as the takeaways.

### **Saturday 20 October 2018**

I had an amazing early morning today. I got up for a pee at about 5am and must have gone back to sleep very quickly, because the next thing I knew was that it was 7:45, and I managed to go on dozing very comfortably until quite late. Pat had gone downstairs at some point and brought me a cup of tea just before 9. I took my time and got downstairs for bathroom duty and breakfast at around 9:30.

After the sharp cold snap yesterday I was relieved to see that the temperature was a comfortable 11 degrees. The day stayed sunny and mild.

I spent a while trying to make recording the various broadcasts related to the US Grand Prix work without losing anything I wanted to record in parallel.

I had to go to the Co-op yet again for some essentials, mainly stuff needed for Pat's cookery lesson with the boys! The resulting cinder toffee was very nice.

I am getting very concerned about my vision, which seems to be deteriorating very quickly. Even my new glasses don't seem to be doing as much good as Mr Dinakaran suggested that they might. My next hospital visit is the urology clinic on Thursday at 9am.

Heather and her daughter Olivia arrived early in the afternoon, and later we went to the near edge of town to a pub for a meal. Everyone seemed happy, including me with a big dish of 'crispy chicken wings and 'dirty fries'.

### **Sunday 21 October 2018**

I had a nice late start this morning with Alistair and the boys already departed – ju-jitsu in Buxton today – and once I had bullied my Kindle into downloading *The Observer* I had a good long read. Towards dusk I went out to water all the containers in the garden and on the terraces. We had Barnsley chops with sautéed potatoes and frozen peas for dinner. The potatoes were an experiment with the dry fryer, and not very successful. They had to be finished in the oven.

I had recorded all the USA Grand Prix segments on Channel 4, and watched just the race itself after dinner. The result was surprising, with Kimi Raikonen taking the lead from pole position at the start and keeping it to the end, and Max Verstappen coming from near the back after a penalty to beat Lewis into third! Vettel was fourth after a lacklustre performance.

## **Monday 22 October 2018**

I saw a crisp, clear night on my four visits to the loo, with the almost-full moon dominating the sky early and then leaving it to Great Orion. I got up at 6:35 to a lovely morning with the temperature at 6 degrees. Our first walk wearing my ex-'best' HiTecs went quite well. They felt snug and supportive. We got round in a rather slow 22 minutes 51 seconds.

While waiting for Pat to come down for breakfast I got the sitting-room cleared for the sweep, who arrived just as Pat was leaving to go to Anton's. He turned out to be a very pleasant chap who worked nights as a prison officer and did sweeping as a sideline. I was really looking forward to getting a basket of logs in and testing the stove, though I might have to wait as he was gluing a new rope seal on the door and making good some crumbling fired cement around the flue pipe. We had a long conversation after he had cleaned up, and found quite a few interests and memories in common. He pointed out that there was no point delaying the annual sweep until we want to light the fire. Much better to get it done around May. That made a lot of sense so I asked him to send me a reminder around then.

Once he had gone I put the log-basket in place and filled it with some of the new wood. He had said that there was no need to delay lighting the fire because of either the cement seal or the new cord gasket in the door, but I decided I would wait until around dinner-time. I did get a large basket of logs in, though, with some chopped fairly thin for kindling. Then I tore about a dozen broadsheet pages from *The Sunday Times* and squashed them into balls. I packed these into the grate and laid a few thinner pieces of wood on top. When the time came to light up, after an unsatisfying meal of reheated leftover pizza from Friday night, the fire didn't catch, so I made some slightly looser paper balls and it started on the second attempt. I had to re-learn the management of the two dampers, but soon had a good fire going. It warmed the room beautifully and I kept it going until bedtime.

## **Tuesday 23 October 2018**

I was very reluctant to get up this morning. I had drifted in and out of sleep after the last visit to the loo and really wanted to surrender completely. Maybe this was the after-effect of spending the evening in the cosy atmosphere generated by the wood-burner! However, when my watch reached 6:30am I bit the bullet, and was dressed and downstairs shortly after 6:35. It was a dull morning, quite windy but mild at 11 degrees.

The front of my left ankle was moderately painful and, as I walked, the outside of the right one started rubbing on the almost-new walking shoe. The collapsed ankle replacement (left) allowed the ankle to roll outwards and the welt of the shoe was a little too high. I decided not to extend the walk to post a birthday card and kept to the usual route – I will drive to the postbox later. I was so relieved to get home that I forgot to stop the watch, so I didn't record a time.

I had a busy morning, cleaning the woodburner after its literal 'baptism of fire' last night. There was very little deposit on the inside of the glass, suggesting that the wood had burned very cleanly. What there was could

be wiped off with a damp piece of kitchen roll. I returned the log-carrying basket to the summer house and shook out the posh log bag which Pat had bought me after we got the stove. I trimmed all the logs which were too big, taking off the parts near the heartwood to give one piece of kindling and a more compact log with my trusty axe. The bag, when fairly full, was pretty heavy to lug through the house but I managed enough wood to top up the 'static' basket beside the hearth. I had retrieved and put down the hearthrug to protect the carpet against flying cinders, and I got the handheld vacuum cleaner out to clear the small amount of ash which had escaped last night.

I had noticed that the catch on the stove door didn't lock very tightly, so I tried winding it in and out with the door open, and it seemed to lock more easily after that.

In between my fire-tending activities I went up to the Original Factory Shop and bought another pair of the HiTec walking shoes and a rather unusual polo shirt to add to my fraying collection.

Today was quite warm, with the temperature peaking at around 17 degrees. By 6pm it had dropped only four degrees to 13, so I didn't think we would need a fire tonight.

For dinner tonight we defrosted two single-helping chicken, prawn and chorizo paellas and microwaved them as instructed. They were quite tasty, but the king prawns reacted badly to the heat, turning rather rubbery and tasteless.

### **Wednesday 24 October 2018**

I was rather reluctant to get out of bed this morning and only got up when I had just enough time to dress and get down for the 7 o'clock news. The extra 20 minutes got me a little more daylight for dressing.

I made tea and improvised a dressing for the outside of my ankle while listening to all the usual rubbish about Brexit. The chafing must have scabbed over during yesterday and it seemed that the scab had almost torn off during the night. It took three plasters to cushion the injury, but I managed to get us round the walk route more-or-less painlessly in 22 minutes 28 seconds. I hope the edge of the HiTec will soften quickly with use. I think I will try wearing some thick, soft walking socks which are stashed in my underwear drawer...

Pat was going to go over to Anton's to do some cleaning, which he won't let her do while he is there, while he is out with his carer. However, the care manager let her know about a change of plan so she decided not to go, and was really relieved to be off the hook.

We had a minor panic with the tumble-dryer telling us it had a clogged filter. Pat cleared the fluff filter and that didn't solve the problem. I found the instruction book but that didn't mention any other filter, and after we had let the machine cool down she put a light load in and it seemed to be working fine, with warm air coming out of the exterior vent, so maybe the air duct had been clogged...

I had quite a busy morning. I went on the *AskMyGP* section of our surgery's website and asked for a call about my bunged-up right ear, but nobody phoned back.

I got the defective Bosch garden blower/vac, plugged it into a known-to-be-working socket, switched it on and, as before, nothing happened. So I dismantled the machine – quite a battle as various bits were sort of shoved together and held by friction. I pulled everything apart and packed all the bits back in the box – an interesting 3D jigsaw puzzle. In the absence of parcel tape, of which we have always had loads, I sealed the box up with quite a lot of gaffer tape (duct tape?). Then I went online to Amazon and managed very quickly to process return and refund. I printed the label with all the addresses and barcodes and PrittStuck it firmly on the box.

Disappointingly, *AskMyGP* hadn't responded so I decided to go up to the surgery to book an appointment. This was going to be combined with taking the parcel to the Post Office, buying some Ibuprofen for Pat's earache and picking up some canned mushy peas, which we normally make by soaking and cooking dried peas. The parcel was launched painlessly, the pharmacy sold me 24 Ibuprofen tablets, an unusually delightful young receptionist at the surgery booked me a nurse appointment for the 5 November in a matter of a few minutes and I found two tins of own-brand peas in the OneStop shop for 70p. Mission accomplished.

The nurse appointment was notified by email shortly after I got home with it already booked!

#### **Thursday 25 October 2018**

I got up for a pee at around 4am and then at regular intervals knowing I had to ensure that I got to the hospital in time for my 9am appointment. I wouldn't have time to take poor Bailey for a walk, so I allowed myself a slight lie-in. I did my normal bathroom duty, took Pat a cup of tea, had a shower and got dressed and had my breakfast with plenty of time to spare.

I found the Endoscopy Unit easily, arriving with time in hand, and had an ultrasound scan and then an X-ray quite quickly, but I waited a long time to be called for my 'Flexible Cystoscopy', which would be like a colonoscopy but with the thinner probe.

The urology consultant used a syringe to inject some lubricant and pain-killing jelly into my urethra and the procedure was only mildly painful. I could see what the camera saw on a screen, but it wasn't as interesting as the colonoscopies. Once it was finished I spent a while talking to him. It seems that my risk of prostate cancer is now quite high, and he will want to see me regularly. This is disappointing because I have got through all these years avoiding the sort of bad stuff that various friends and other contemporaries have suffered.

I was allowed to have a pee before getting dressed, and realised what a battering my bits had taken. I desperately needed to pee but the output was rather strangled and the pain was far out of proportion to the amount of wee produced. I really understood what women with cystitis say – that it is like peeing broken glass.

Once home I had several more, equally painful pees. After coffee I drank quite a lot of water and this didn't really help. I had a horrible feeling that my nocturnal visits to the loo tonight would be many and very unpleasant indeed.



Things looked more promising later. After we had had lunch (tea with buttered fruit loaf) I felt quite a lot better and by 3pm the static pain had almost disappeared. Even when I went to the door to see Gary from Ringtons, our tea-and-biscuit man, I was feeling almost completely normal!

After our 4pm tea and biscuits I was called to the loo and had two much-less-painful (but nevertheless pretty eyewatering!) pees. I took two Paracetamols in the hope that they might ease the sting a bit. At least there is hardly any pain when I am sitting still, as I am now at 17:05.

I am determined not to be panicked by today's revelations. Even as I am writing this, Pat is talking on the phone to our friend John who has had confirmed prostate cancer for quite a long time – I'd guess at least ten years. He has had some pretty scary and upsetting episodes, but he is still going strong and keeping his spirits up. Right now I am more concerned about catching up some of the sleep I lost this early morning. Having said that, there was very little pain when I was sitting still, and the pain while peeing – though still sharp – was less severe than it had been earlier.

I risked a small glass of white wine with the rest of the leftover steak pie and had a reasonably comfortable evening without *too* many trips to the loo, when the pain level remained about the same.

### **Friday 26 October 2018**

My whole night seemed to have been rather restless, thanks to mild urethral discomfort and frequent far-more-painful trips to the loo. I had described the feeling last evening as being like 'peeing barbed wire'.

At one point I needed to top my water glass up and managed to drop it in the basin. I gathered the bigger bits together to put on the windowsill and flushed the rest down the plughole. Later on, when Pat and I were both awake, I told her what had happened and she gave me her glass. I had actually decided to drink a little more than usual through last night to flush my system out.

I got up at 6:35 and went through the usual routine, with the extra job of replacing the plaster on the scab on the outside of my right ankle. Even with this padded, I didn't feel much like walking but managed almost 15 minutes for Bailey's benefit. By the time we got out I had had several pees and they had been quite a bit less painful than last evening's.

Pat had to go to the shop and brought me back a Cranberry Juice Drink. This is what women used to ease the discomfort of cystitis...

Alistair and the boys arrived in the early evening, which lifted the moods all round.

### **Monday 29 October 2018**

Sunday was uneventful, with Alistair taking the boys home after lunch. Except, that is, for Pat suggesting some cream which had been prescribed for her legs, to see if it would work on the intense itching round my ankles, which it did, almost miraculously.

We split two Aldi ready meals of spicy chicken wings in the first and drumstricks in the second, cooking half of each and keeping the rest,

probably for tonight. I put some Aldi Oven French Fries in the dry fryer, and the result was very palatable.

Today started pretty catastrophically. I was awake at around 6am (having put the clocks back to GMT yesterday) and at 6:15 felt the radiator behind the head of our bed to check that the heating had come on. It hadn't, so I got dressed quickly and went down to check that I had adjusted the programmer clock correctly. It was obvious that something was wrong: the boiler was showing an error message and zero water pressure, and water was running (rather than dripping) from the magnetic filter. I found the valve to top up the water and the boiler fired up, but even more water ran out of the top of the filter until everything had warmed up. I had put some heavy towels under the leak but now needed the washing-up bowl. I concluded that the seal in the top of the filter – probably a big o-ring – had failed – so that when cold (as it was during the night) it leaked quite badly. Once the heating was operating there was hardly any leakage so I was able to dispense with the bowl and just leave a towel to catch any drips. I left message with my boiler-care company and on their engineer's mobile, and hope to see someone before bedtime, because I am fairly sure the leakage will become much more serious when the heating is turned off, meaning we will have to keep it on all night. I was chuffed with my success in diagnosing the problem but wanted the problem solved as soon as possible.

As a result of all this Bailey and I didn't get our morning walk.

Late in the morning I had a letter from the hospital with an appointment to see Mr Darrad, the consultant who did my cystoscopy last week. He wants to see me again on the 25 January. I am pretty sure my prostate is cancerous, but he is obviously not seeing it as critically urgent, which is (I hope) reassuring. He did say that the next step might be a needle biopsy.

The pain I have been having when peeing after his work has definitely faded quite a bit by this morning. It still prickles, but much less intensely, which is a great relief!

Between us Pat and I managed to get Anton's fax machine working after the time-change. It's a pity the Social Services financial support *isn't* working – we are going to have to sent a pretty pissed-off email...

My vision has been difficult over the last few days, particularly when trying to read the computer screen. Paradoxically, the keyboard looks very clear, so at least the bottom halves of my varifocals are working. There seems to be a small area where the screen actually does look clear. Maybe I *shouldn't* have gone to SpecSavers...

I did cook the chicken and fries again this evening and we enjoyed them very much.

## **Tuesday 30 October 2018**

It was cold (4 degrees) but dry after what muist have been some light rain. I was very reluctant indeed to get up, because at around 6am (GMT) I had managed to get into a perfectly comfortable position, lying face-down with my head facing to my right and one leg cocked. However, I managed to get myself up in time for the 7 o'clock news. My feet were

feeling better than they have for a couple of weeks and we had a decent walk, getting round in 22 minutes 19 seconds with no mishaps.

This was my bed-changing day, with the heaviest and most gorgeous duvet cover due to go on the down quilts. I had the usual wrestle with the Tempur mattresses and the long job of checking that the two quilts were fully press-studded together before getting them into the cover, which is quite stiff. Before putting on the new fitted sheets I ran the little Vax cleaner over the mattresses. I had noticed that my down pillows, which I had decided weren't as comfortable as they had been a few months ago, when the loft door was open, and got one out of its bag to swop for one of the polyester ones I had bought. The down one was wonderfully puffed up after a few months rest in the loft, so I hope it will work for me tonight...

Once the bed was made I shook the rugs and vacced the floors of the bedroom and en-suite, and then had a long lovely shower. I would need to get to the pharmacy after 2pm to collect what I hope will be all of our pending prescriptions.

When checking the prescriptions' status I also put in a request for one to get me some of Pat's wonder-lotion – DoubleBase Gel. This was acknowledged fairly quickly. Later, when I had collected this month's meds shortly after 2pm, I realised that my prescription only gave me 28 Naproxen tablets but told me to take two a day. I sent another message in via the website, pointing out that this would only work for 14 days and asking for this to be sorted out. I am only taking 1½ tablets on most days but I still need more than 7 a week!

The wind was very cold when I walked over to the shops, so when I was back I decided to light the woodburning stove. I dug the instruction manual out the other day, and I had a quick read about the use of the two air controls – primary under the bottom grate and secondary at the top of the firebox. I learned (again, because I had mastered it all in previous years), Basically the secondary one is for burning wood and the primary one for smokeless fuel on the grate. Having got my head round this I soon had a lovely fire going, with rapidly-dancing flames, pouring masses of radiant heat out into the whole room. It took much less than half a basket of wood to keep the fire going until bedtime.

I paid the cost of lots of crawling around while sorting the fire out, though: my left foot felt pretty battered by bedtime.

Pat had defrosted a container of Mary Berry's Malaysian fried rice, which made a spicy change from the takeaway-style chicken and fries.

### **Wednesday 31 October 2018**

I had another really good early morning: up for a pee at around 4am and then crashing out, without any silly getting-back-to-sleep strategies, until around 6, feeling completely comfortable. The down pillow felt wonderful, and I couldn't remember why I had decided put the two away in exchange for new polyester ones two or three years ago. Again, I would have loved to roll over and go back to sleep, but I got up at 6:40. I hope I can maintain this pattern until Saturday and Sunday so I can sleep until about 9am.

I decided to change the morning start time on the central heating from 6am to 5, giving me an extra hour, but I really struggled to read the tiny lettering on the programmer, even in my new glasses. I needed my three-D-cell Maglite with the LED bulb I bought for it recently to see what I was doing! The reassuring thing is that, *with* the torch, I could read the text quite clearly. Maybe the blasted floaters are making the images I see darker but not blurring them. Most of them are translucent – little irregular areas of shadow – so this would make sense. I tried lifting the brightness on the computer monitor to see if this would help but it didn't seem to.

It was a beautiful morning, but the temperature was only one degree. The left foot still felt bad, and to my shame I only managed a 9½-minute walk for Bailey. Amazingly I didn't need my gloves.

My work with the woodburner had left me eager to get to grips with the fire, so after breakfast I took the log bag out of the conservatory and transferred the odd bits of kindling into the big basket beside the sitting-room hearth. Then I went through the basket and took out all the biggest logs – mostly the wedge-shaped ones from big branches and trunks which wouldn't be easy (if even possible) to get through the stove's door. The sharp edges from the centre of the branch/trunk needed splitting off. These could be used for kindling while the rest of the log would be easier to fit in with the other wood in the stove. I split some more logs from the store in the shed and took them in to fill the basket. My felling-axe technique is definitely improving with practice. One skill which I worked out was for splitting the offcuts of wide board which came in my log supply last year from Craig's newly-purchased sawmill. It was impossible to stand them on end for splitting but if I laid them flat on the chopping block and aligned the axe with the grain they would split easily.

Before lunch, I laid the fire in my usual way. First I separated individual pages of *The Sunday Times* and screwed twelve up into fairly tight balls. I used one of these to scrub the stove's grate clear of ash and small bits of charcoal. Then I squeezed the balls into two rows of six and criss-crossed fairly thin pieces of wood on top of the paper in between two and three layers. I left both the primary and secondary air controls wide open ready for lighting. The primary one would be closed as soon as the fire was established and the secondary one used to control the rate of burning once some decent logs had been added.

Pat went to the hairdresser for a quick trim just before 3, and was back amazingly early.

It had been a beautiful day, with a temperature of 10 degrees towards 3pm forecast to drop no lower than 6 before bedtime, but I lit the fire anyway! I haven't emptied the ashes since the first fire-up, which confirms that Craig's logs are of very high quality. I think I will need to do this before we have another fire, though.

I had peeled 750 grams of potatoes ready for boiling and mashing, to be served with grilled sausages and some leftover gravy from the freezer, accompanied by Branston baked beans, which we really prefer to Heinz!

We put a big tin of sweets on the hall table but we didn't get a single 'trick-or-treat' visit all evening. Maybe the kids will wait until Saturday in spite of being on half-term this week.

### **Thursday 1 November 2018**

From one degree yesterday morning to eight today. Our weather really is amazingly erratic. The difference was that this morning was grey, the ground was damp. Light rain and a peak temperature of 9 degrees were forecast.

All my log-splitting and bag-lugging into the house, plus crawling around tending the fire, had left my left foot feeling at least as badly battered as it did yesterday. I thought I might have to cut the walk short again, but I got round the full circuit, though in a very slow 24 minutes 50 seconds (the last weekly average above 22 minutes was at the beginning of October).

After breakfast we compiled a relatively short shopping list and I decided that our Co-op wouldn't have everything so I would go to Tesco. I managed to get Robertsons' mincemeat, but only in small jars, and Batchelors' Quick Soak dried peas, which I have always managed to get there as Christmas approaches, but otherwise the visit was rather disappointing and I had to call at our local Co-op for Pat's breakfast cereal and some treats for the dog on the way home. Either Morrisons or Sainsbury's would be better than Tesco as it is now.

By early afternoon I was out cutting wood in just a shirt and joggers, enjoying a temperature of 11 degrees. I emptied the ashes and was amazed how little ash our first four fires of the year had produced. Once I had vacuumed and wiped down the fireplace and the woodstove, and had used my big axe to reduce a couple of logs to light kindling (practice makes perfect!), I was able to lay a fire which we would definitely *not* need this evening but will be ready if the temperature drops again.

I intended to cook salmon fillets with new potatoes for dinner but Pat had been baking all afternoon and neither of us felt much like eating. We settled for two toasted and buttered crumpets each, one with Marmite and the other with Golden Syrup, washed down with a cup of tea (Pat actually asked me if I wanted wine with the first one!).

### **Friday 2 November 2018**

After various more-or-less painful pees, I got up and stayed up at 6:40am. A beautiful, sunny morning was following a spectacular star-scape. There was a chilly breeze when we went out, but it was not unpleasant and we finished the lap comfortably in 22 minutes 14 seconds.

The day drifted away with shopping to feed Alistair and the boys and all sorts of stuff.

There was a bit of a panic because Pat had promised to get Anton some spare light bulbs (only as standby's), but couldn't find the 100-watt clear lamps which Anton prefers.

### **Saturday 3 November 2018**

I didn't get my Saturday lie-in I didn't get my Saturday lie-in because Pat had found out that Anton had no spare light-bulbs. She had messed

around with Amazon, Ebay, Google and all, and had found a supply of what she needed: clear 100-watt old-fashioned lamps with filaments, but she couldn't get a delivery before Tuesday. She had got very worked up about this. I refused to believe that similar bulbs couldn't be bought in one of our big DiY shops, so I checked that B&Q and Wickes would be open from 7am this morning and got up horribly early. I knew B&Q had a pretty huge electrical section, so I went there first. The lamps I wanted were 'hidden' on a bottom shelf: 120-watt halogens in standard bayonet-fitting clear glass bulbs, available in boxes of three, of which I bought three to make up nine – close enough to her hoped-for ten. I was home, duly triumphant, well in time for breakfast.

Heather and her girls arrived later. We fed them on pizza and other party-style stuff.

As soon as it was dark enough, Alistair produced a box of fireworks and we had a fun half-hour with them.

Everything had calmed down before 9pm, allowing us to settle with the latest Scandi thriller, *Beck*.

#### **Sunday 4 November 2018**

I *did* get my Sunday lie-in, joining the gang in time for breakfast. As usual Alistair had to get the boys back to Buxton for ju-jitsu, so we had the rest of the weekend to ourselves. Pat had been worried about Alistair driving because he had been quite unwell for a while yesterday, but he texted to say he had got the boys home with no problems.

We failed to feed ourselves properly again this evening, resorting to toasted crumpets again.

#### **Monday 5 November 2018**

Pat got up early because her regular Monday visit to Anton was going to be complicated by a visit from someone who specialises in the mental health of people with sensory impairments.

My *Outlook* calendar said the builders would be here this morning to finish the repairs to the sitting-room window, but her note said they should have been here last Sunday! I was proved right when they arrived shortly after 9am, and she got off shortly after that.

A couple of oilings got my wretched waxed-up right ear ready for syringing at 12:10 this lunchtime. The result was spectacular – full hi-fi stereo restored and the most disgusting brown dollop of wax removed. I must keep up with the olive oil drops from now on.

When Pat got home she was really frustrated. The meeting with the mental health worker had gone really well and will be repeated next Monday, but Executor Services seem to be continuing to screw Anton's financing up. Pat's inability to get Anton's money out of the bank means that she is having to carry the cost of his weekly shop and doesn't have many chances of reimbursing herself.

My eyes were really bad over the weekend and not much better by 10 o'clock this morning. The drops prescribed by Mr Dinakaran's sidekick didn't seem to be doing a lot of good, and in fact sting my lower lids when first dropped in. The floaters seem to be getting much worse far too

quickly for my taste, and are impairing my vision more and more, particularly with the computer screen. The new glasses don't seem to have helped much, if at all.

The replacing of the dislodged pieces of slate was going really well by mid-afternoon, though whether there would be enough pieces to finish the job remained to be seen. I had managed to break a couple of decent pieces of the same slate off the construction around the garden pond built by our predecessors, giving the guys a bit more leeway, and I found out where the slate came from – China! I couldn't find a UK supplier, though. More Googling revealed another possibility: Topps Tiles, about a mile from here, had a range of Chinese slate tiles which would probably be a good enough match.

The guys were impressed with my photograph of the car on its low-loader on the way to Lincoln, which showed that it had suffered far less damage than the masonry. Mercedes-Benz 1: Peterborough Fletton bricks nil.

Late on, we managed to break quite a substantial piece of slate off the pond surround. This was thick enough to split and, broken up, it allowed the brickie to finish this stage of the job. However, he was unsure about when he would be sent back to do the pointing, which was rather depressing. Apparently the insurers prioritise on the basis of how the damage is threatening the building or the occupants, and our repair is now safe and weatherproof.

### **Tuesday 6 November 2018**

I had a long, restless period before getting up at 6:25 this morning. We are due to visit my daughter Sarah in Peterborough at the weekend, but I had all sorts of misgivings which I would need to discuss with Pat. We looked at all the problems we have been having with family – particularly Alistair and Anton – and agreed that we were tired and ready for some respite. Neither of us has driven the car far in the dark, and the drive back up the A1 from Peterborough, on the worst of that road's non-motorway stretches looked rather daunting. I texted Sarah and asked her to give me a ring, and when she did she wasn't at all bothered. We will be seeing them at the family gathering here shortly before Christmas, after all.

I felt very relieved that this was sorted out. I spent quite a lot of time emailing the building contractor about the pointing, reminding them – among other things! – that we had been living on a building site for five months, and I was agreeably surprised when I got a phone call telling me that the pointing would be done next Monday. Progress at last, and I hadn't needed to use my big gun: threatening my insurance company that I wouldn't be renewing with them unless the contractor finished the job quickly! I may well switch the house-and-contents insurance to Aviva, who handled the car repairs fairly well, anyway.

### **Wednesday 7 November 2018**

I made a decision this morning: I would try getting up an hour later until the weather warmed up and daylight arrived a lot earlier. I tried it and it worked well, with hardly any schoolkids out on our street. So I could look forward to an extra hour's sleep – if I could sleep – every weekday morning from now on.

Sue had given Pat the details of a good gardener (also named Paul) and she phoned him to arrange a visit. He came at about 2pm this afternoon and seemed to know what he was talking about. He would be happy to do specific jobs as and when we wanted, and agreed to wait until I had got Steve to do the big trees. He also recommended the Council's 'brown bin' system for garden waste, and I put in an online application for a bin for next year.

### **Thursday 8 November 2018**

This morning was my first official 'winter timing' one following yesterday's decision. I was able to roll over at 6:30 and enjoy the down quilt and pillows for another hour, and get dressed in broad daylight (previously I had had to do it by the dim glow from the clock-radio!). It was a chilly morning after the warmer ones we have been having, with the thermometer reading just 6 degrees. The sky was beautifully clear, though, following an enjoyable encounter with the constellation of Orion the Hunter and its attendant stars during a loo break.

My feet – and particularly the left one – were stiff and painful when I got up – as they had been last night after a long and uninterrupted session of TV – but eased as I went through my morning rituals, and I was walking fairly comfortably by the time we were halfway round our route.

Everything was quiet outside, and when we were walking the two sections of our circuit which are approach-routes to the primary school all the kids must have been inside. This was one of the main objectives for the time change, which I think will have to be maintained for next summer, too.

### **Monday 12 November 2018**

The weekend was very quiet indeed, with Pat well stuck into Christmas cooking, for which I had to do yet another fairly hefty Sainsbury's shop – and also making a huge apple crumble, half apples from our tree out of the freezer and half home-grown Bramleys from John and Sue, for which I made about a litre of custard (my own recipe of 50/50 whole milk and double cream, sugar, cornflour and yellow food colouring. Sadly, the last item was a bit scarce, with none on the shelf at the Co-op, so the custard was rather pale. The pudding followed grilled fish fingers with leftover new potatoes and peas.

For Sunday's dinner I carefully filleted a large steak, bought a while ago in the Welbeck Farm Shop, into one clean-and-lean portion for Pat and a bigger all-fat-and-gristle-included one for me. The meat was a little disappointing, with even the lean meat rather tough and tasteless. But the crumble and custard made a sensational dessert!

The frequency (and productivity) of my visits to the loo was very high over the weekend, and I feared that I might be wakened a lot last night.

In fact, I was got out of bed just once at 2:30am and started brooding about my orthopaedic appointment at 3:20pm next Monday. When I accepted that from the cancellation line at the Royal Derby I didn't think how late 15:20 was.

It felt as if I didn't get back to sleep at all and continued rehearsing possible ways to solve the problem until almost 7:30am, by which time I was stuck with the same-old sale-old Royal Derby horror.



Every appointment starts with a wait for someone to leave the car park, which usually takes a very long time. This is followed by another – and usually longer – wait before a trip to X-ray, which starts with its own wait. All this makes it easy to remember why we enjoy going to Bassetlaw, our local hospital where there is always plenty of space. Once back from X-ray there is another wait in the smaller clinic's waiting room, after which we are taken to a small consulting room for – you guessed it! – yet another wait. We usually see a junior doctor, who usually goes off to consult my consultant, Mr Milner, and returns either alone or accompanied by the boss. My guess is that we will be very lucky to escape before 6pm, and the bad news is that the outcome is usually 'see you next year' – not that I would welcome the alternative of more surgery. That would only be acceptable if I was in serious trouble.

This morning I phoned to try to nail an earlier spot from a cancellation, but there weren't any. I was recommended to try again on Friday, when there might have been some late drop-outs. I hope there will be, because otherwise we have a very long night drive in the tail-end of the rush hour, bypassing Derby on the A38 to the M1's junction 28, going up the motorway itself to junction 30 (there is a newish 29a on the way) all with the benefit of excellent lighting and then about ten miles of unlit country roads. Neither of us has done much night-driving since we got the Merc, but Pat has suggested that she does the drive home after I have got us to Derby.

I got up earlier than planned under the new regime – at around 7am – partly because we were expecting the builders to finish (finally!) the repairs to the stonework under the bay window. It was a pleasant morning, but chilly at 6 degrees, and I made a point of walking as briskly as the bones would allow, which was actually fairly quick.

Once I had settled down after the brickie arrived and Pat went off to Anton's, I suddenly realised how tired I was, so I decided I really had stayed awake more-or-less all night. I managed to keep reasonably alert while watching the Brazilian Grand Prix highlights, which I had recorded from Channel 4 last night. Lewis as champion driver *and* Mercedes as champion team was good news for me.

The brickie arrived before 9am and left shortly after 3pm. It would be some time – he estimated two or three weeks – before we could judge the result of his skilled pointing because the mortar had to 'go off' and the slate stones were covered in cement dust – a job for my trusty pressure washer, I decided. Meanwhile, it all looked a whole lot better!

One little triumph: I had been unable to get decent sound out of the PC for quite a long time, so I decided to pull the main box forward on the desk to investigate the connections on the back. It turned out that there were three rather than two 3.5mm stereo jack sockets on the back, the top one hiding under the overhang, and when I plugged the lead into that one the Sony Baby Hi-Fi started generating really rich, high-quality sound from my many MP3 files, mostly stolen off commercial CDs. Now we will be able to listen to Aidan's band and Barney's new compositions when they send me links...

**Thursday 14 November 2018**

Things were a bit chaotic yesterday as Pat hobbled downstairs barely able to walk. The lower back had seized up as it does from time to time, leaving her fairly helpless, so I had to wait on her. At Pat's suggestion we had hot gods for dinner! He back hadn't ease before she went to bed.

I managed to do the usual walk in 22 minutes 53 seconds and got through all the usual chores. I got up this morning at 7:30am and did the walk on a very sore left foot, cutting the distance by turning round in about eight minutes and arriving home in 17 minutes 3 seconds. I was greatly relieved to see Pat arriving downstairs for breakfast looking a little stiff but much more comfortable than yesterday.

The left foot eased through the day, but I would like to get it a lot more comfortable before the hospital appointment next Monday so I can give the doctors a fairly positive report in the hope that I can get off the annual-review roundabout. We live much too far from Derby to keep trekking up and down, so I hope I might be able to report any major problems to our local hospital. Or maybe Mr Milner will agree to leaving it to me to report anything serious...

We did odd stuff through the day. My major job was to get the Karcher pressure washer out of the garage, connect it up with extension leads and the long hose, so that I could use the awesome DirtBlaster fitting to strip the slimy accumulation of dirty water and rotting algae off the decking bridge over the pond, which had become like a tiny ice rink which I didn't dare to cross. By mid-afternoon the bridge was clean and had dried, and I was able to walk across it confidently.

I will need the Karcher in good order when I wash the new stonework under the sittingroom bay window so that we can see how well the repairs match the other window.

At around 3pm I made what turned out to be the mistake of checking my bank-account spreadsheet against the Smile website. Things were looking scary, showing some nasty excess overdrafts, until I realised that I had corrupted a formula and copied it down the balance column through a month of two. By 4pm I had everything sorted out except that I had borrowed more money from the savings account and one of my credit cards than I needed to. Correcting that would have to wait until tomorrow.

### **Friday 15 November 2018**

I tried hard to stay in bed until 7:30 but got restless and got out of bed at 7:15. The feet felt reasonable and I managed the usual walk in a rather slow 23 minutes. It was a dry but dull morning with a temperature of 11 degrees, and our only encounter was the friendly long-haired shepherd.

When I had got the PC warmed up I went into the Smile banking website and got my spreadsheet right up-to-date. I had borrowed some money from the savings account and more from my MBNA Visa credit card and decided to leave those in the current account as a Christmas buffer. Then January will have to be the beginning of a more sensible financial routine!

Pat decided to do some tidying-up in the garden this morning and I went down to check the bridge. It was safe to walk on, but I hadn't removed the slimy algae from the paving stones beyond it. I went and got the hoses, mains extension and Karcher out again and gave the paving

between the pond and the summer-house a good scouring. Then I went back up to the patio to do what the whole jet-washing operation was about: getting the heavy hardwood furniture into its winter storage on the summer-house veranda. First I carried two heavy teak chairs down, then another two and then the remaining one – all pretty heavy.

The best bit was getting the circular table down the garden. I have always folded the legs and rolled it on its circular top with hiccups as the legs hit the ground. This time I left the leg in position and rolled the table entirely on the edge of the top, which was much better. I leaned the table against its chairs and then went back for the small four-seater hardwood suite, which I carried down much more easily.

We did various other tidying jobs, working until lunchtime indoors and out. After lunch I went to the Co-op to get some lunchtime items to give Pat – who was getting bored with cheese and crackers – a wider choice. I got corned beef, tinned mackerel in oil and various other things she likes. Personally, I wouldn't give tuppence for a corned beef sandwich, but each to his own.

By 3pm we felt justified in watching the final two episodes of the excellent serial *Dark Heart*. This took us close to dinner, which would be burgers from the Farmers' Market with fries and....something, probably baked beans!

### **Wednesday 21 November 2018**

I seem to have lost my way with the diary a bit since Friday – hardly surprising as a rather vicious respiratory infection flared up over the weekend. It seems to have peaked over the past couple of days, with lots of coughing and sneezing all day and more-or-less all night. The most alarming symptoms are the creaks and groans emitted from my windpipe when I breathe in and out. I have mistaken them for a mobile phone vibrating several times!

Crucially I got through fairly early to Orthopaedics on Monday and cancelled my afternoon appointment. As soon as that was done I got onto the AskMyGP section of the GP practice website and put a short statement of what I wanted on and got an appointment to see a doctor straight away, at 10:10am. The duty doctor was a delightful young South Asian lady doctor called (I think) Dr Swaris, who agreed with me that my best course would be to write to my orthopaedic consultant in Derby, Mr Milner, which I did straight away when I got back home. Here is the letter:

*Dear Mr Milner*

*As you may have gathered from my recent rescheduling of appointments, Patricia and I have been finding it increasingly difficult to get to Derby and back for my annual reviews. She is now 73 and I am 75 and we both have quite severe vision problems. Yesterday's 15:20 appointment would have meant driving home through the Derby rush hour, up the A38 to the M1 and then onto the mostly-unlit country roads to Worksop and home, a journey lasting well over an hour, in total darkness and probably rain. Frankly neither of us felt up to the task, so I cancelled the appointment this morning and went to see my GP, to discuss the possibility of transferring my case to our local hospital.*

*My GP practice is Larwood Health Partnership, The Village Surgery, Long Lane, Carlton in Lindrick, Worksop, Nottinghamshire, S81 9AR, phone 01909 73293 and my own GP is Dr Cheuk Lai Tang. Yesterday I saw a new GP whose name I believe was Dr Swaris and who advised me to write directly to you. She thought that my request for you to transfer my case to Bassetlaw would be better coming from me than from her, so this it.*

*I have had some orthopaedic work done over the years at Bassetlaw, which is a ten-minute drive from home – though nothing as exciting as ankle replacement or fusion done while fully conscious! – but the experience has mostly been good. Bassetlaw is part of Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Its address is Bassetlaw Hospital, Kilton, Worksop, S81 0BD, phone 01909 500990..*

*Nothing very dramatic has happened to my ankles in the last three years (apart from you telling me last year that I had somehow broken the rod you had hammered into my left tibia!), and if anything I am having less pain and swelling in that one now than a year or so ago. In spite of the terrifying X-rays showing the right ankle replacement totally out of alignment and moving on a knife-edge, the ankle is close to pain-free, flexing, extending and even rotating a little. I haven't felt the need to use one or other of my many splints and braces for well over a year.*

*I am very grateful to you for keeping me on my feet since the replacement operation in March 2006, and to Claire for the support we have had on several occasions from her, and I will miss our annual chats.*

I printed two copies of the letter, one to post to Derby and the other to give to Dr Swaris as soon as possible. Pat posted the Derby letter this morning for me and I will drop the copy in at the surgery next time I go over to our little shopping precinct.

After two disturbed nights, the bug seemed to be subsiding a bit by 4pm today when Pat came back from a shopping jaunt with her friends Sue and Steph, but I was still coughing quite unpleasantly. 'A bit' is about right, though.

#### **Thursday 22 November 2018**

I managed to get quite a lot done this morning, in spite of still feeling pretty rough. I did some essential shopping at the Co-op and then split, bagged and brought in about 60 pounds of logs. Later, after I had laid and lit the fire, I decided to go out and get a second batch. So all in all my old body seems to be working pretty well in spite of the bug and all the other dodgy bits.

I'm a bit ashamed that I haven't given the poor dog a walk since last Friday, but Bailey doesn't seem to be unduly upset – he is just spending much longer than usual charging round the garden.

#### **Friday 23 November 2018**

I had a rather bad night, needing to get up at some point to go downstairs to the bathroom to get rid of the products of two days of constipation – a painful process, but I managed it. Then, later, I was wakened by the need to cough – a long, drawn-out, rasping, dry effort. Following all this I woke at 8:15 to find that Pat had got up, so I got out of bed and tidied it, and as I opened the door to go down found Pat outside with a tray of tea. She

did an about-turn and we went downstairs to have a leisurely cup before breakfast. She had been badly disturbed by pains in her back and legs, so we made a pretty sorry pair.

I felt a bit sweaty and rather shivery – not good after several days with this bug.

After breakfast there was a(nother!) shopping list to compile...

...and buy, on this cold, dewy morning. Once home I set about splitting logs and – bringing in two very heavy bags to fill the basket by the fireplace ready for a fire and keep a reserve stock. I rubbed the scanty ashes through the grate with one of the ten balls of newspaper I needed to light the fire and laid the fire.

Then I got stuck into vacuuming downstairs, which I had volunteered to do while Pat was cooking – I don't know why with two untidy boys arriving this evening!

Then I had a session on the computer, struggling with very small type on the Sainsbury's Bank website, and then remembering that I could zoom the web page to 125%! That made my deteriorating vision quite a bit more effective, allowing me to pay my Mastercard balance for the month without errors and then update my spreadsheet to make sure no errors had crept in. A few had, but were soon corrected now I could see what I was doing.

## **Tuesday 27 November 2018**

I managed walks with Bailey both yesterday morning and this morning – the latter a bit bleak at 3 degrees C, but with no visible frost. Yesterday we got round in 22 minutes 12 seconds and today in 22 minutes 3 seconds, in spite of my thinking that I might have to stop today's walk early because the left heel and ankle were painful when I set out.

We took Pat's sewing machine to an engineer in Clowne, a historic Derbyshire coal-mining village about halfway between here and Chesterfield, and were disappointed when there was nobody at home. On the way back we stopped at our local Aldi, filling a trolley with Christmas goodies.

My bug was still very active this morning and I had been rather reluctant to go out. I'm finding that, if I don't drive for a few days, I start to get a bit anxious about driving any distance, but as usual the Merc ran like a dream and I really enjoyed the drives.

Pat spoke to the engineer this afternoon and we'll be taking it again tomorrow, so I can enjoy another drive.

We tried one each of two different mince pies at lunchtime, and after receiving Aldi's sumptuous Christmas book, we were both rather disappointed. The ones Pat makes using Raymond Blanc's butter-rich pastry recipe and supercharging Robertsons' mincemeat with cognac are way better than any commercial ones we have ever tasted. In spite of the excitement the Aldi book gave us, I think pies, puddings and cakes are going to have to be home-made. I tried a box of baklava, and that was pretty poor too.

The evening meal was the nice new square sandwich rolls generously filled with very good streaky bacon and fried mushrooms.

### **Wednesday 28 November 2018**

I managed another walk with Bailey this morning with the temperature at 9 degrees and no rain after a very wet night. When we got back I had to get one of our wheelie-bins in and forgot to stop the watch. As my feet were feeling a bit battered I estimated the time at 23 minutes.

After breakfast we went off to Clowne to leave the sewing-machine with Peter Hipwell, the engineer. Pat was interested in some of the many machines which filled his garage/workshop and was particularly taken with a Swiss-made Bernina, mainly because it was mechanical, with no digital stuff. We did a bit of haggling and in the end Peter said he would take the little Elna in part-exchange, leaving a balance of £260 – way less than the new price of any of the Bernina range. Pat said she would think about this and get back to him. With my encouragement she phoned and accepted the offer. I suggested she should have the machine for Christmas as her second present (the first is a state secret, and I hope she never finds out how much that cost – just over two hundred!) I tried to buy an instruction book for the new machine online but without success – just PDF files for free. The manual only has thirty-odd pages, so I will be able to print it. However, my stock of 80gsm printer/copier paper had mysteriously run out so I had to order a ream on Amazon for delivery tomorrow. We will be out for part of the afternoon collecting the Bernina, so I had the paper delivered to the local Post Office. Later, I went across the road in a howling 40-mph-plus gale (having just bodged a temporary repair to our garden fence with some g-clamps) to get £300 cash for the machine on my Sainsbury's MasterCard – not the ideal plan, but it would have to do as I am still battling to knock our finances into shape. I will pay at least that on my next card bill.

### **Thursday 29 November 2018**

We managed a good walk this morning, with the temperature at over 7 degrees. Again, my left foot hurt when we set out but improved as we went. I was glad to sit down when we got home, though.

I decided to try printing on thin, flexible card, which worked well and before we went to get the machine I had a complete instruction book printed, punched and installed in an old ring binder.

We went back to Clowne after lunch and spent an interesting hour with Peter Hipwell demonstrating all the amazing tricks the Bernina could do, all mechanically and without any electronics whatever. Pat was thrilled to bits with it, and unlike me she seemed to understand what he was doing! We did a five-minute shop at the Co-op on the way home. And I lugged the amazingly heavy machine in from the car. Unfortunately Pat had the Christmas cake to make and many presents to wrap so she didn't even get the machine out of its bag.

### **Friday 30 November 2018**

Each of my trips to the loo during the night was rewarded with the sight of Orion and his little pals in a crystal-clear sky.

I was delayed getting back to bed after the 4am pee because I discovered that the bedroom radiators were stone cold. Still half asleep, I looked out of the window to see if we had a power cut and then considered going downstairs to see if there was a problem with the boiler or the electricity supply. Finally, I woke up fully and remembered that the heating is programmed to be off until 5am! I crawled back into bed, chuckling at my stupidity, and waited for the first pings of the expanding radiators.

I seemed to have managed to sleep well between pees and was very reluctant to get up at about 7:15. The morning was bright with a temperature of 7 degrees. The light wind was cuttingly cold, though, and I was quite pleased to get back indoors after 23 minutes 45 seconds on the hoof. I hope I will have sleep as good tomorrow morning, when I will be under no pressure to get up...

The day was uneventful, but we did a fair bit of cleaning and tidying – probably not very clever as Alistair and the boys would be here this evening.

I spent quite a lot of time trying to get on top of the finances. I just have to avoid spending from the current account (savings have little to offer!) and get through the month without a nose-dive using the two credit cards.

I got a glimpse of my main Christmas present from Pat – a very large piece of foie gras with veins of black truffle running through it! - before it was consigned to a really cold fridge until the big day. This will only be shared with my most discerning friends!

The menu for Christmas dinner is going to centre round a boned sirloin of beef, a turkey crown and a nice piece of gammon. I will be ordering all three from the Welbeck Farm Shop fairly soon, and may get some other essentials like sausage meat from there or from Eatons butchers in Tickhill. Aidan and Donnie will be with us (me cooking for a professional chef!), as well as poor old Anton. Thanks to the *Sunday Times* wine club, the stock of good wine is pretty good.

### **Saturday 1 December 2018**

Full house today with Alistair and the oys and Heather with her two girls. I had to do a fairly quick shop at Sainsbury's once Pat had decided what she wanted to feed to everyone. It was cold and wet and generally unpleasant and I was glad to get everything – including myself! - unloaded and in the house.

Things were pretty chaotic with everyone squeezed into the kitchen for a spectacular all-day breakfast conjured up by Pat, and we were quite relieved when the Dewsbury Gang left Al and his boys to do their electronic things.

### **Sunday 2 December 2018**

A quiet day with nothing really to report once Alistair had taken the boys for their first visit to Heather's, made possible by Tom leaving both their Ju-Jitsu outfits in his school locker.

### **Monday 3 December 2018**

Pat had a fairly tranquil visit to Anton, whose mental health lady failed to turn up as expected. I started tackling a couple of assignments, first to

track down some replacement garden fence panels. My Google searches had been fruitless, but I changed my search string and the ones I needed were the first to show. I ordered two to be delivered on Friday. My other urgent task was to repair the mounting of the dog-gate top hinge. I managed this with the aid of quite a lot of Araldite, which mixed quite successfully with crumbling plasterboard, leaving the resin to cure until tomorrow morning.

### **Tuesday 4 December 2018**

We had a silly episode, akin to my error with the central heating a few days ago. I got up to pee at 5ish and Pat asked me if I had taken the green bin out yesterday. She thought she had heard the bin lorry, and I got dressed ready to go down – before I reminded her that the bin goes out on Tuesday. I crawled back into bed half-dressed and we had a laugh over the mistake. In recompense, I treated myself to a lie-in, getting up just in time for the 8 o'clock news. The morning was beautiful, but with an outside temperature of exactly zero. I wrapped up warm for the walk and we did the usual lap in 23 minutes 10 seconds.

I replaced Bailey's gate on its hinges, and it seemed to be holding up well, but only time will tell.

I had my usual wrestling match with our Tempur mattresses and was ready for a shower by the time I had finished vacuuming, but within seconds our heavy water pressure blew the shower-head off the hose. I finished with a dribble from the end of the hose, and later on I Araldited the broken component together – but not before I had found a replacement Mira head on Amazon and ordered it for delivery tomorrow. After the repaired head had been baked for a few hours on the kitchen radiator to cure the resin I reconnected and tested it: it held together well, with flow as normal, but I'll be more confident with a proper replacement.

Pat went across to the hairdresser's after a light lunch and I wrote a dozen or so card to old friends and acquaintance, Pat having done all the others. I then embarked on another wander round my bank account. The spreadsheet shows that I have paid the MBNA Visa account and the MBNA site shows the payment as pending but I can't see anything on the bank site.

### **Thursday 6 December 2018**

I had a shower yesterday with the Araldited head and it held perfectly. Later on, when the new head arrived from Amazon, I fitted it and Pat said she had had a lovely shower with it. Showers are one of our greatest pleasures because our water-pressure is really strong (this could explain why the shower head got blown apart!), and we both found the idea of being without a shower very depressing.

We put together a long list of foodstuffs we will need to be ready for Christmas and I headed out to Sainsbury's, with a detour via the Welbeck Farm Shop to order a joint of beef – 2kg sirloin off the bone – and a four-pound pork pie, and to pick up lots (48 links!) of their delicious thin pork sausages to make pigs in blankets, using the sensational streaky bacon we discovered at Sainsbury's last week. For our three-meat Christmas dinner we will be getting the turkey crown from M&S and a decent piece



of gammon from a supplier as yet unidentified, but M&S is probably favourite for that, too.

It took ages for me to get to Welbeck, thanks to new road works close to the junction between the Mansfield and Chesterfield roads. This is about a quarter of a mile from the big roundabout that connects the town to the A57, but the traffic was moving at a very slow walking pace. Most of the time I had the car in first gear and both feet off the pedals, with the engine just idling. Luckily the temporary traffic lights were more effective at getting the traffic moving back *towards* town.

I had a pretty epic voyage round Sainsbury's, with the heavily loaded trolley (thanks in part to a pack of twelve 450-gram cans of dog food) almost impossible to control on the way back to the car through the rather hilly carpark. It was obvious later on that all the manhandling had done my right ankle no good at all: the inside of what's left of the joint was very sore and tender. I plastered Voltarol gel on, which eased it a little, but it was still quite painful when I went to bed.

When I got the almost impossibly heavy bags back home we had quite a job getting everything unpacked and stowed away.

I cooked linguine with a jar of tomato and mascarpone sauce, but by the time I had tamed the resolutely *al dente* pasta the whole thing was a bit heavy and gooey, even with a generous sprinkle of Parmesan and Pecorino.

### **Friday 7 December 2018**

In spite of the phone-call I received yesterday I wasn't sure of the time-window for the delivery of the fence panels today. This and my still-sore right ankle – plus some nasty wind and rain – let me off the morning walk. In the end, I got a call from the delivery guys saying they would be with us around 1pm, which they were. They stashed the panels behind our side gate, which blocked the view of the road and was safely bolted.

Pat wanted some very small photographs of Ewan and Tom to fit into some clever but fiddly custom tree baubles. I had to separate the two halves of the picture showing both lads and then scale them to fit the baubles – a serious fiddle! Then, in the middle of printing, my amazing HP printer/scanner/copier reported a paper jam and was more solidly clogged than it has ever been before. I had to open the top compartment where the cartridges sit and grab the paper edges with pliers before I finally got hold of the sheet of glossy photo paper and the remnants of a sheet of ordinary 80gsm copy paper. Ripping a few bits out liberated the glossy and eventually I got all the scraps out. To my amazement I managed to print flawless images straight away, after being convinced that I was going to have to buy a new machine. The PhotoSmart 5520 has been amazing for several years, and is obviously really tough inside. My Dad, a keen photographer since the 1920s, would have been totally gobsmacked by what we can do with photographs today.

Having already sorted the beef at Welbeck, I ordered the rest of our Christmas roasts online from M&S. A turkey crown and a lovely-looking pre-cooked gammon joint will be waiting for me between 1:30 and 2pm on Sunday 23 December at our local Markies and the sirloin and pork pie between 9am and midday at the Welbeck Farm shop.

This evening I will do my old favourite, roasted chicken wings, which I used to do with baked potato wedges but am trying with Albert Bartlett's oven chips, which I will do in the dry fryer. His spuds, red and white, are always good, so we will see...

### **Sunday 9 December 2018**

Aidan and Donni came over during the morning and my biggest stepson and I managed to get the two new fence panels installed, though he did have to climb over neighbour Craig's side gate so we could attack the job from both sides. The new panels are very robust and look really good.

### **Monday 10 December 2018**

The chips were very good and we ate a whole bag over the weekend. We also had fish and chips from across the road for the first time in ages – pretty poor, I thought, but Pat thought they were okay.

Last night I cooked one of the ostrich fillets I had ordered a while ago, and it was much better than the Wagyu steaks - quite tender and tasty, but not as delicious as I thought I remembered from when we were going to the farmers' market regularly.

I decided a day or two ago to try a new night-time routine to help with my nocturnal peeing. I had been rationing myself to a very small sip of water after each visit to the loo in the hope of needing to pee less, and this left me with a very dry mouth and feeling quite groggy when I got up. Last night I allowed myself as much water as I wanted, which left my mouth feeling better and didn't increase the number of loo visits, but I felt just as groggy as usual, if not more and the feeling lasted longer than usual.

Pat was testing her blood sugar and suggested I should try mine. To my disgust the reading was 9.1 of whatever units the machine tests for. Around five to six would have been a lot better, so I suppose I will have to get properly tested. I had just eaten a dish of muesli, prunes and yogurt, and drunk half a glass of orange juice, so I had better try again tomorrow *before* breakfast.

We made Stroganoff with the leftover ostrich meat. I have to say I am disappointed with Oslinc. The alleged Wagyu steaks were very poor and the ostrich fillet roast was nowhere near as good as they used to be. Never again!

### **Tuesday 11 December 2018**

Plenty of pees overnight (five, I think) but reasonable rest in between. My new overnight regime, with the heating coming on later than before and me drinking more water overnight than before, hasn't changed how I feel in the morning much.

It was a dull but dry morning with a temperature of just two degrees but forecast to rise to five. There was a card to post, so Bailey and I walked up to the Post Office and back instead of doing the usual route. I forgot to start and stop the watch, probably because both my ankles were quite sore, in spite of them having behaved well yesterday, so I will log a guess at 16 minutes.

There was quite a lot of preparation work to do this week. I needed to get the large accumulation of bottles and jars to the tip and get methylated

spirit for the fish smoker from B&Q, because I will be hot-smoking two nice big salmon tail fillets - one for the family gift exchange on Sunday and the other for Christmas day, with all remains ready for the Boxing Day buffet.

The two are close together so that made a sensible trip. Wickes were more on my way than B&Q and I walked in, spotting the bright violet colour of the meths bottles as soon as I turned onto the relevant lane. Getting to the tip was a challenge because of the crazy road works which are going on around us. I managed, though, and then managed to find one glass skip that wasn't quite totally full – I only needed to push items in diagonally to get them past the pyramid inside.

Once home, I finished clearing up from the fencing job, taking all the dismantled old panels down to the side of the summer house and stacking the wood vertically to stop it getting waterlogged.

By the end of the afternoon we were both too weary to think about food so we had a bowl of cereal each – corn flakes for Pat and one of the kids' boxes for me.

### **Wednesday 12 December 2018**

I felt very comfortable just lying awake in bed after several pees and reasonable sleep in between, waiting to hear the radiator clunking at 6:30am as the hot water ran in. I got up at 7:15 and started my usual morning routine. My feet and ankles were hurting quite badly, so I reduced the walk to 17 minutes 15 seconds.

The inside of the right ankle (failed replacement) was most painful so I put one of my white fabric ProSport supports on over a generous basting of Voltarol gel. It seemed to help from the beginning.

While Pat was working away in the kitchen, I took Bailey to see the dog groomer, arriving at 2pm. I left him with her and went back to the village where she lives and, to my absolute astonishment found the barber shop empty. I got my hair, beard and eyebrows done for a painless £5.50 and went to the cashpoint for money to pay the groomer. I drove the couple of miles to home, to wait for the call to collect the boy, but she called within five minutes of my arrival. I brought Bailey home smelling and looking very nice, and with well trimmed and rounded claws.

Pat was mass-producing trays of mince pie using Raymond Blanc's amazing pastry recipe. My backup task was to find – or create – freezer space for the trays in their individual carrier bags, by moving and swapping the contents of the inside and outside freezers.

I cooked small jacket potatoes, which we ate with baked beans, grated Cheddar and HP sauce at dinner-time, but she was still making more and more delicious pies as the time approached 8pm.

My main enjoyment was watching the Conservative Party self-destructing over Europe – yet again.

I kept the support on until bedtime, and it seemed to provide quite a lot of relief from the soreness.

### **Thursday 12 December 2018**

The ankle really did feel better when I got up, but I decided the walk would be a little foolish, especially with the temperature at about three degrees.

Towards midday I did another supermarket shop. Pat was still baking when I got home, and I set about my ex-sister-in-law's salmon mousse recipe for both the Sunday gathering and Christmas Day (leftovers for Boxing Day). Unfortunately I screwed up. You have to put gelatine leaves in a bowl over a pan of simmering water, and in an absent-minded moment I poured the water instead of the gelatine mix into the mousse! I put the gelatine mix in anyway and hoped the mousse would set. If not, I'll need to get more ingredient in the morning and start again.

### **Saturday 15 December 2018**

Fairly frenzied Christmas preparations yesterday and today. Yesterday I got all but one of the boxes of decorations down from the garage loft and stacked on the chest freezer, and today I managed to get the last one down – a carton full of candles that must have weight around 30kg. Sliding it off the loft floor onto the ladder was quite scary and sliding it down the ladder was pretty challenging. I got it down eventually, but this actually left me panting.

We got started with preparations for the family gathering tomorrow, finishing decoration and lights, and generally sorting the place out with all presents under the tree (including the massive weight of Pat's Bernina sewing machine in a TK Max woven plastic Christmas shopping bag but excepting my main one from Pat, which will stay in the fridge until eaten!).

We were well and truly ready for bed by about 9pm. We had both decided that BBC4's American 'thriller' series called *The Sinner* wasn't worth pursuing so Pat went to Bed and I followed very soon.

### **Monday 17 December 2018**

We managed to get everything ready by 1pm yesterday and my last surviving *real family* all turned up at the same time around 2pm: my blood daughter, Sarah, with her husband Dave and my first stepson, Steve, with his wife Sue and daughters Anastasia and Josie. Ironically, my son David, who would have completed the set, died 13 years and just 3 days ago.

We all had a very enjoyable time, and I had a particularly surprising nostalgia session with Sarah's Dave which added to the coincidences I described in this diary back in early September. When I was working for S John Woods at AEI, our offices were at 33 Grosvenor Place, London SW1, and it turned out that Dave had worked there briefly too. Sarah overheard the conversation and said that someone she knew had worked in Devonshire House, Piccadilly, only a short walk across Green Park from 33 Grosvenor Place, which is where my Dad worked for the Distillers Company for many years, and latterly for BP Chemicals. It really is a small world!

I had a good (for me) night's sleep last night, up once for a pee at around 2am and again around 6am, with solid sleep in between. I got up at 7:10 feeling fairly refreshed.

While Pat was preparing for her weekly visit to Anton, I 'did the accounts' and was relieved to see that my main teacher's pension has been credited at over £890 for the month, with my four weeks' state pension of £656 due on the 4 January. Sadly these will still leave large debit balances on both credit cards, a situation I have never allowed to happen before. I think buying the Mercedes and the holiday in Norfolk account for quite a bit of that, but addictive shopping at Amazon probably run them a close third. This must be controlled...

I set up a new section on my bank-account spreadsheet a while ago to show regular monthly incomings and outgoings. This showed fixed outgoings by direct debit totalling £1251 and fixed incomings totalling £2002, leaving a credit balance of £751.

It might be worth trying to get rid of some of the outgoings, like charity lotteries and maybe appliance insurances...

There is another route we have been discussing – equity release from the house. Neither of us feels under any great obligation to leave a couple of hundred thousand pounds to our children and grandchildfen, having spent a fortune raising them and keeping them afloat, so a large windfall of the order of £150,000, some sitting in an investment account of some sort earning interest and the rest providing more cash to spend or, for example, to pay off the car loan, would make what is left of our lives a lot more relaxed. Pat's sister Jackie and her husband Bob have done this, and I intend to get Bob in a corner at our Boxing Day do to pick his brains.

To my surprise I got an email from Aviva about this very subject today, allowing me to get a clearer idea of what is involved. I'll still talk to Bob, though, as he has a background in finance.

We had chicken fried rice (home-made) in front of the TV tonight – the biggest meal we've eaten at home for ages. This should have some laxative powers...

## **Tuesday 18 December 2018**

It didn't. Even with two Senacots and one DulcoEase my early-morning trip to the loo was hard work.

That came after I failed to stick to my discipline and lazed in bed until 8am. By the time I had got the LED lights in the sitting room fired up, I was wide awake but my left foot felt pretty rough, so I failed with the walk as well. I need to get my act together...

We were both pretty busy getting Christmas preparations done for the rest of the day. The biggest challenge was getting the blue LED set over the outside doors of the conservatory. I had forgotten that I usually let the ends of the set hang vertically while the middle is draped elegantly across the end of the building. The resulting improvisation was rather unimpressive!

The good news was the arrival of my new cooking thermometer, which has a heat-proof metal-clad cable between the stainless steel probe and the neat little box of electronics, so it can be used to measure the temperature of the oven or the meat in the oven. As our cooker's temperature control seems pretty dicey, so I look forward to testing it.

We had tabboulet – a cous-cous based salad – with my salmon mousse and hot-smoked salmon for dinner on our laps while watching Nigella.

### **Wednesday 19 December 2018**

I woke to a horribly damp, grey morning, with both ankles quite sore after yesterdays antics, so I had to cancel the walk again. I think I might as well leave it and re-start after Boxing Day. I got up at 7:15am only because my bladder wouldn't allow me to stay in bed any longer – about the fifth loo visit of the night. Where does it all come from with only two glasses of water at the mlst to work on?

I decided to start investigating Morrisons' online shopping because our local Co-op and Sainsbury's have both gone down the drain. We wil have to use them both for odd small shopping trips, but no more for the big shops. Morrisons sell my essential Le Rustique Camembert and seem to have Winalot dog foods in stock, so that looks like a good start. I need to investigate how to build up a list of essentials and favourites...

By 11am I had decided that Morrisons' website was unusable. I don't know if it is being disrupted by Windows 10 but with my vision it is impossible to navigate round it. As a web developer myself I am appalled that a firm of this stature would put up with such awful technology. Now: Tesco...Sainsburys...Asda...? I get by at Sainsburys, and I like what I buy there so that looks like a possible answer. However, I used to buy from Ocado, which has links to Waitrose, so...

I started a shop on Ocado and this was much easier than at Morrisons, but after a while the site froze and came back in a stupid message saying 'Clean-up on aisle five', which was really silly. A few minutes later the silly bit vanished but the apology was still there. It had a link offering 'go back' and this worked. Quality web design...?

I managed everything I wanted with my first Ocado order, including editing the order after it had been confirmed. Given the Christmas congestion it is no surprise that the order will be delivered a week tomorrow – Friday 28 December. At least that gives me plenty of time to edit the order – and spend an awful lot of money! I am paying with PayPal, which means the money will come straight out of the bank, but I think I can change this to use one of the credit cards.

The good news was that Ocado do sell dog food, including Bailey's Winalot meat in jelly, which has become rather scarce in our local shops, and Shapes biscuits.

I will obviously find lots more of our regular shopping items in future sessions, but they will be added to my favourites, making future shopping much easier.

Ironically, I will need to go to the local Co-op for some urgent odds and ends when Pat gets back to her annual Ladies Who Lunch session at Ye Olde Bell, the famous old coaching inn in Barnby Moor.

The facility to edit an order wasn't very obvious on the Ocado site to begin with. I read it as having to compile a preliminary order, which would be priced and scheduled for delivery and then I would be able to make changes *somehow*. I found quite soon that I could display the whole of my order pictorially and call up a little information panel for each item simply

by floating the mouse pointer over it. I could also add another of the same item or delete one or more – very easy and intuitive.

My order is due for delivery on the 28 December so I assume I'll be able to go on adding to and deleting from the order until a couple of days before that.

### **Friday 21 December 2018**

I was very reluctant to get up this morning, but managed my usual routine after the 7:30am Radio 4 news bulletin. I didn't really want to go out into the moderate rain that was falling to stress my legs and ankles, which were still weary after yesterday's shopping. Bailey was very persuasive, though and I soon weakened. We did 15 minutes round the block, with a bit on his long lead when we got off the streets onto the footpath with its grassy verges. I actually felt better for the walk, so I was glad Bailey had shamed me into it.

We had agreed to visit our own local Aldi today and duly went off there after breakfast. Because of this my planned trip to the Co-op hadn't happened and Aldi became just the first store in a pretty epic tour!

We spent over £150 in Aldi and then went home to unpack our spoils. I had a very small list of stuff which we hadn't found there, so I had a quick run to Asda, which is closer to us than Aldi. I got most of the missing bits of shopping there and stopped off at our village Co-op for the rest. Missions more-or-less accomplished – phew!

Masses of other preparations went on until late afternoon when Pat actually allowed herself an hour with Kirsty Allsopp's 'crafters'.

After that I managed to serve fish fingers and chips for dinner and we struggled to keep awake through the evening. We watched the reconstruction of Victoria's and Albert's wedding but Pat conked out about half an hour before it finished. I saved the rest on disc for her.

### **Saturday 22 December 2018**

Pat was going out with her syster Jackie and niece Becky to celebrate Jackie's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, but while she was in the shower she called me to say that the bedroom shower wasn't draining away. By the time i got upstairs she had cured the fault herself, switching the drainage pump back on at the mains.

When I got downstairs I also had plumbing problems – no hot water at the kitchen sink. Water was flooding out of the magnetic filter attached to the boiler, reducing the water pressure in the boiler to next-to-nothing. Luckily I knew where the supply valve was and was able to repressurise it, and the leaking got less, presumably as the water in the system drained away. I put an old washing-up bowl down to catch the drips. Then I contacted our service agents but the best they could offer – under quite a bit of pressure – was an engineer visit on Christmas Eve morning. This is going to clash with me going to the Welbeck Farm Shop to collect our sirloin of beef and 4lb pork pie, for which the window is 9am to 2pm – more generous than M&S the day before, where I had to collect the turkey crown and the gammon joint between 1:30pm and 2pm, which would require me going early in case of hold-ups. I need to get some other stuff at Marks assuming the store is open longer than that.

Once I had sorted that as well as possible I took the two lovely salmon tail fillets out of the fridge and salted them generously for a pre-smoking cure. This drew quite a lot of liquid out of the fish, and I left it for about 2½ hours. I then smoked each fillet in turn in the garage, and while keeping an eye on that I glued and cramped the split seat of an old pine dining chair so that we will be able to seat five in the kitchen without carrying antique chairs through from the conservatory.

I went back to check the boiler at about 2:45pm and there was only a few millimetres of water in the bowl, but I noticed that water was also dripping from a thin copper pipe under the boiler onto the worktop below. The boiler pressure had dropped quite a bit since early morning and I struggled to open the valve to repressurise the it again.

All in all, not a very relaxed day! A call from Pat when she got to her destination outside Sheffield brought good news: as she was driving out of the gate and delivery van had stopped to deliver a special case of very serious but heavily discounted red wines I ordered from Laithwaites late on Thursday. To save time she had had the case put in the car boot. The wines were all sold for £4.99 a bottle – two each of six kinds – with some bonus offers. Unusually the case contained 14 bottles, two of them Cabalié, the French red I found among my Wine Club cases recently and loved immediately. Fourteen bottles and two beautiful Dartington Crystal goblets cost me just £59.88!

### **Friday 28 December 2018**

I haven't fitted diary entries into our usual insane Christmas of endless shopping and cooking.

We coped pretty well with Christmas dinner for ourselves, Aidan and Donni (Anton wouldn't come to the table and didn't want to eat anything – his vision loss is getting close to total and I think most of his life is noticing flickering on the TV in front of him). I roasted the turkey crown and the sirloin joint in an oven which is rapidly becoming uncontrollable, and Pat managed the vegetables and gravies.

We managed to set up for a monster Boxing Day buffet, and even to get completely cleared before going to bed. Hardly surprising then that on Thursday 27 December we were almost totally knackered! Pat had to drive Anton home and get him settled, and after that we did pretty well as little as possible.

This morning we both agreed that I should get examined following various lapses of memory which have been noticed by both Pat and my daughter Sarah when she was up for our 'family reunion'. I decided that I should get checked and posted the following on our GP surgery's *AskMyGP* service.

*I am regularly forgetting things of which I have been fully aware. There was an instance at the table recently when my wife and my grown-up daughter realised that I had forgotten that one of the dishes had been brought to the table right in front of me but I was talking about fetching it. My daughter had not seen me for a year and told me wife that she had noticed changes in me. Other examples include forgetting to turn off gas-rings when cooking. After a long and successful professional career I am approaching my 76th birthday. I am fairly sure that this has not been*



*happening very long but instances have increased markedly in the past few months and even weeks. I think I should be investigated for the onset of dementia as a matter of urgency.*

After half an hour or so I hadn't heard anything back, but got a call later to see a doctor, who put me through some rudimentary tests and agreed that I ought to be seen by a professional in the field of dementia even if nothing dramatic was happening yet.

To add to this, my eyes have been very bleary this morning. I don't seem to be able to blink away whatever is causing the problem, even with the special drops prescribed by my ophthalmology consultant. I can focus on the 11-point Verdana as I type this, but it has clouds drifting over it all the time and my eyes are sticky and watery. After watching Anton struggling this is quite scary.

### **Friday 4 January 2019**

The build-up to New Year's Day was very tame after the pre-Christmas stuff, but I haven't felt much like updating the diary. One of my main preoccupations has been to get the bank-account spreadsheet synced with the bank's website, which I have finally got sorted out today. A useful addition is the repayment number for the car and furniture loans, letting me see how much progress is being made – currently 26 months paid for the sofas and 8 for the car.

I will need this and similar information because Pat's brother-in-law Bob finally rang this morning to give me the contact details for the adviser who handled their equity release plan. The key piece, of course, will be the current valuation for the house, for which a little look through the files revealed that I paid £180,000 in cash.

I tried the pills which the GP prescribed at the request of the urology consultant. However, when I read the leaflet that came with them suggested that almost all my repeat prescriptions might react badly with them. They are diuretics, intended to make me pee all afternoon and evening so that I will be dehydrated when I go to sleep and won't need to wake for the loo. I was not impressed with the trial, so I will contact the GP on Monday before trying any more.

I got up to pee five or six times last night but fell asleep very quickly after getting back into bed afterwards. I had got up reasonable early every day this week so I could take Bailey for a short walk, but I really struggled this morning after my last trip to the loo. My left ankle was quite painful so I cut the walk down to 7¼ minutes in a temperature of just one degree.

I have lit the woodburner three days running this week, and after 2:30pm I cleared the stove out and laid the paper and kindling for another fire. This made an ashy mess, which prompted me to order a new dustpan and brush to replace the ones that got broken over Christmas.

Pat had decided to start the Twelfth Night ritual early, so once the fire was laid I joined in. Then I broke off to prepare a meal of floured, seasoned and fried salmon, sauté potatoes and frozen petits pois. It really was time we got back into the groove of eating proper dinners. We had plenty of home-made and shop-bought cold desserts to top tonight's off.

## **Monday 7 January 2019**

Like our catering, Pat's Christmas decorations are rather excessive and the task of getting everything down and packed away was seemingly endless. My longest task was disentangling the two incredibly long strings of LED lights, one white and one coloured, from our faithful Christmas tree, coiling them carefully and securing the coils with twisties. For me the worst part was getting the many cartons up the ladder into the garage loft. The narrow runs of the ladder were very painful to step on (mountain boots next year instead of my walking shoes perhaps) and I felt quite precarious getting some of the bigger and heavier boxes onto the loft floor. The tree, in its very heavy tub, was hard to carry outside but I managed, and the needles were looking healthier quite soon after their first breath of fresh air – or so I convinced myself.

As always, our home looked quite bleak once everything was back to normal.

This morning I felt as if *I* was getting back to normal, too. I had managed to do the whole of our walking route for the first time in a few weeks, albeit rather slowly taking about 25 minutes. I had put a ProSport support on the left ankle when getting dressed and the walk was only mildly painful. The ankles feel quite good as I write this. I hope I will be able to stay in the old the morning routine from now on.

After breakfast I used our GP practice's online 'AskMyGP' facility to get guidance on the diuretic tablets prescribed on the request of the urology consultant. I have an appointment for a blood-pressure check tomorrow afternoon, which I think has also been requested by the urologist. I hope this won't clash with a visit from the insurance company engineer to check the freezer, which has been malfunctioning right through Christmas, of all times!

I asked for a face-to-face appointment and later checked my online account's appointments page to see that I had one in the mid-afternoon. I showered and changed, and then a got a phone-call from Dr Kumar, whom I remembered seeing him shortly after we registered with the practice a very long time ago. He told me that they had booked my for a telephone appointment, and he was quite reassuring about the diuretic drug and its interactions with other substances.

## **Wednesday 9 January 2019**

The appliance engineer came yesterday afternoon and concluded that the freezer needed leaving to defrost for three days or so, something that a properly adjusted modern freezer shouldn't need – particularly as he had told me that the offending appliance had been provided under the insurance warranty only a year ago. Indesit again!

Some time after he left he phoned to ask if he had left his test meter behind. He had, and I agreed that he was welcome to collect it at about 8am today. In the event he didn't get here until after 9am, disrupting my morning routine and leaving the dog without a walk.

Yesterday's diuretic dose had sent me to the loo frequently through the afternoon and early evening but only three times through the night.

I had an exhausting morning and early afternoon trying to hide the mains and aerial wiring which I had installed earlier in the week for the new Panasonic compact stereo system and to which Pat had taken grave exception! This took a lot of improvisation, but in the end I managed to get the connections well hidden. I think an electrical safety inspection might have had something to say about my mains connection, but I felt confident that what I had set up would be quite safe. I had even had to get my soldering iron out to join two cables – something I haven't used for a very long time.

#### **Thursday 10 January 2019**

I took the diuretic in the mid-afternoon instead of at 1pm as directed yesterday, but it seemed to work fairly well and I only got up three times, at times very similar to those the night before. Maybe this plan is going to work. I see the urology consultant a week tomorrow.

I still felt very tired when I got up at 7:30am, and my left foot was painful after all yesterday's gymnastics installing the cables for the stereo. In spite of that, and the temperature of just two degrees, I managed to get the dog out for a 16½-minute walk, which was fairly painful but manageable. I didn't feel the cold (2 degrees) as the air was bone dry with no wind.

I spent most of the morning and early afternoon putting the fixtures in the corner of the kitchen back together after yesterday's struggle to route the power supply to the new stereo. There are few things more difficult than re-mounting a solid oak base-unit door in a tight corner (which I did eventually manage) and adjusting the hinges to align the door correctly (which I didn't).

#### **Friday 11 January 2019**

I got up at 7:15 this morning, wanting to pee but with no real urgency. My log sheet confirmed my belief that I had got up to pee only *twice* during the night. Would I have gone to the loo and then back to the bed, logging another three-pee night, if I hadn't been very eager to score two pees for the first time in years? Whatever, the diuretic is obviously working, and – surprisingly – without too many pees through the afternoon and evening. When I see Mr Darrad in two weeks I should be reporting a dramatic success.

My left foot and ankle were very stiff and painful when I first got up, but it eased enough for me to try a walk. I did the same route as yesterday without too much difficulty in a shorter time of 15½ minutes, though I was definitely glad to get home. The temperature of 7 degrees was five higher than yesterday but the westerly wind felt a lot colder when it was in my face.

I had been considering restarting the freezer this morning. It has been open in the utility room with a temperature over 20 degrees since the engineer left on Tuesday afternoon, so I couldn't believe there would be any ice left in the works, but he had advised me to leave it off for three days, so I would be best leaving switch-on until late this afternoon, or even tomorrow morning. My digital probe cooking thermometer was showing an air temperature inside one of the drawers of around 22 degrees this morning.

I decided to power the freezer up between 3 and 3:30pm, and towards 4pm the glass shelves were feeling quite cold. The red hazard triangle was showing on the display inside the door and the audio signal was going off every couple of minutes. The target temperature of -20°C was showing and I assumed the signal was to say that the temperature was too high. I put my little tin fridge/freezer thermometer inside. By 4pm the needle had just moved from the refrigerator band to the freezer one – promising. At 4:45pm the little thermometer was showing -20 and the alarm signals had stopped. I moved bags of chips, wedges and peas from the outside freezer to the repaired one in the utility room with a great sense of relief.

I did an old Friday-night tradition of roasted chicken wings and potato wedges (McCain brand rather than my home-made variety) which filled us up and left lots of leftovers, the chicken for a stockpot and the wedges for the bin. This all went down well but I forgot to go out to the garage freezer for choc-ice lollies. I will be out there tomorrow to start moving stuff back into the recovered inside freezer at last! No problem for me: there is still plenty of leftover Christmas pudding and brandy butter, which also went down really well.

### **Saturday 12 January 2019**

I was much too hot in bed when I woke, with the radiator behind our bed-head almost too hot to touch. I needed a pee, which would have been number four if I had got back into bed, but I went downstairs to spend some time fiddling with the boiler settings.

The freezer was fine, to my great relief.

Pat was out like a light when I took her a cup of tea at around 8:45, and didn't even stir. I heard the first floorboard creak at around 9:30 and she sounded fairly active after that.

After breakfast I took a large shopping bag out to the garage and filled it several times from the chest freezer to stock the repaired upright one up again. I kept watch over the freezer on and off all day and it was fine, the display showing the target -20°C.

During the afternoon Pat baked a tray of 12 of her wonderful mince pies alongside six bake-at-home Waitrose *pains aux raisins* (Pat's favourite item of French *croissanterie*) from my pre-Christmas Ocado delivery, which I had to pull apart in spite of the dough being very soft and sticky. I managed to get them modelled into reasonable shapes and they looked fairly convincing when they came out of the oven.

For the second night in a row, I cooked a decent square meal tonight: two small salmon steaks seasoned, floured and fried with buttery boiled new potatoes and *petits pois*, followed again with Christmas pudding and brandy butter.

Before bed I set a seven-day alarm for 1pm on my mobile phone to remind me to take the diuretic tablet (or half of one) each day.

### **Sunday 13 January 2019**

Last night's pee-count was a bit ambiguous, with two through the night and one more shortly before 8am. I logged the last one, but as I decided to get up shortly afterwards that didn't count as 'nocturia'. I took Pat a cup of tea before going out to the paper shop, and then set up for

breakfast, which included setting the combi microwave to warm as a 'proper' oven to 150°C. They baked quite well and tasted very good, so next time I do an Ocado order I will stock up on these.

The alarm on the phone alerted me to diuretic time at 1pm.

Tonight's dinner, for which Pat made Yorkshire puddings this morning, was posh bangers and mash with green beans and onion gravy. Dessert was a bread-and-butter pudding made with fruit-loaf slices.

### **Monday 14 January 2019**

I had logged just two visits to the loo overnight, at 3am and 6:10am. I got up shortly after 7am and managed another rather short walk with Bailey. The morning was cool, but I only discovered the chill when I was walking from east to west – the relatively moderate wind was very sharp indeed.

I had a cheque for £180 packed in one of my bank's deposit envelopes, but Pat was convinced that the main village Post Office was closed on Mondays – and so was the World Wide Web! The car was getting very low on diesel so I decided to visit Sainsbury's garage, passing the Post Office, before she went off to Anton's. To my surprise and delight, the Post Office was open, and the lady minding the shop couldn't understand why the Royal Mail website thought it would be closed until tomorrow. So the cheque is on its way to Smile.co.uk...

After Pat left to go to Anton's (because she doesn't like the smell!) I boiled up the remnants of Friday's chicken wings to make stock.

I transferred my scribbled night pee log to the spreadsheet ready to print for Mr Darrad on the 25 January.

Neither of us felt like eating at dinner time, so we had a very light snack.

### **Tuesday 15 January 2019**

After a long period of restlessness I must have fallen asleep, because suddenly, when I thought I would need to get up for my fifth pee I realised that it was 7:10am. I decided to stay up, leaving the night with a score of only four!

I felt surprisingly fresh and quite enjoyed the repeat of yesterday's walk, which we completed in 16 minutes. I felt a little *less* fresh when I had taken the landfill wheelie-bin from the back garden to the front gate ready for collection tomorrow. Christmas must have generated a horrendous amount of heavy garbage because the bin was literally almost impossible to move. The recycling bin was much heavier than usual last week but today's was horrific.

Today's visit to the bank website was quite encouraging. It looks as if some careful management is finally getting the account out of the red and into the black. I'm over £800 overdrawn today but should be in credit when the largest of my pension payments hits the account (tomorrow, I hope!). When the cheque for £180 from Pat's friend Sue is cleared things will really be under control. Bye bye Christmas!

Later today we went shopping together, mainly for the ingredients needed for Cullen Skink. Pat's sister Jackie and husband Bob are coming over to deliver my birthday present tomorrow, and asked for the classic Scottish

fish soup/stew when we invited them to stay for lunch. (Pat and Jackie were brought up in North-East Scotland.) We chose Morrisons because they, of the main supermarkets, usually have the best fresh fish, but they had no natural smoked haddock – just the bright yellow kind. We had no practical alternative, so we bought some. The Cullen Skink is going to look a little unusual tomorrow...!

Tonight's dinner is based around some delicious sausage meat I found in Sainsbury's before Christmas.

### **Thursday 17 January 2019**

The Cullen Skink somehow suppressed the yellow dye on the smoked haddock, which made a very tasty soup/stew. We had a very pleasant afternoon with Jackie and Bob, with a modest amount of wine being consumed.

This morning dawned bright and clear, with the Morning Star very sharp in the sky with a pale but very clear fullish moon. The temperature was just one degree Celsius, and on the windier legs of the walk the effect was chilling. By the time we got home some of the bones in the back of my hands were aching quite badly and the fingertips felt burnt.

Luckily the walk only took 14 minutes and we were soon back with the central heating.

Our forecast for the week threatens very low temperatures with the possibility of sleet and light snow.

We were busy this morning clearing the way for Aidan and Alistair bringing two large items of furniture home on Saturday morning – an antique chest of drawers and Pat's old oak extending table, which she lent to Alistair and Julie many years ago but won't fit in Julie's new little house. She wants to keep them as the chest in particular is quite a valued family heirloom. I had to create a clear run through the garage and Pat had to take everything off and out of the sideboard so it could all be transferred to the chest. The sideboard and the table are going to live in the summer-house, so I had to create the necessary space in there too.

### **Sunday 20 January 2019**

Alistair took the boys back to Buxton yesterday morning after a one-night stay and Aidan met his there with one of his company's large vans, which he backed into our driveway with impressive precision. My run through the garage got both the chest and the table (dismantled) through to the back and the decision was soon made to keep the current sideboard in the sitting-room and put both the salvaged items in the summer-house at the bottom of the garden. After a snack and a gossip, Aidan headed back to return the van in Hull and Alistair went home to Dewsbury, leaving us with some Continental thrillers from *Walter Presents*.

This morning we both got a decent sleep-in, with Pat coming down to make breakfast just as I went out to the local shop for the Sunday paper and an extra bottle of milk. The feet had felt pretty bad when I got out of bed but loosened up as soon as I got downstairs and allowed me a surprisingly painless walk to the shop. I hope this will continue for some decent dog walks this week.

I finally managed to get Aidan's band, Braver than Fiction, on the web and we could listen to some of their music on the little Sony stereo from the PC. The songs and performances were pretty impressive!

Later on she went up to the Co-op to do the shopping for her visit to Anton tomorrow, also bringing back a seasoned chicken ready to roast for this evening's meal.

The roast-in-the-bag chicken was good except that it didn't brown as much as it should have done. Albert Bartlett Home Chips (cooked in the oven with the chicken rather than dry-fried) and frozen petits pois went well with the bird and some nice little strawberry yogurts bought for and ignored by the kids made a quick and easy dessert.

We caught up with *Les Misérables* during the evening, watching two episodes back-to-back.

### **Monday 21 January 2019**

I got a good night's sleep, punctuated by only two pee-breaks from which I got back to sleep quickly. I did wake for a third break but it turned out to be 7:10am when I did, which was time to get up so that one didn't count! I have got the spreadsheet almost up-to-date and printing nicely, almost ready for my urology appointment on Friday.

Bailey and I had a pleasant walk on what turned out to be a dry and bright morning, chilly at 3 degrees but with only a light southerly breeze. Pat had to get to Anton's early because of a gas safety check, so she had left by about 9:15am, leaving me to replace the missing fire-cement round the woodburner's flue.

At about 9:30 I got a call from the gas people to check that they would be able to get in at Anton's, and I told them my wife was on the way. I sent her a text to let her know the appointment had been confirmed, only to hear a ping and a buzz. Once again, the bloody woman had gone off in the car without her mobile, meaning that I will be anxious until she gets back. I am also angry, because every time she does this I give her a serious telling-off and she still leaves the damned thing behind. Considering the time she spends texting with her family I'd expect the phone to be permanently glued to her, but...

I got a call at around 2:30pm from Mercedes saying our MoT is due. I agreed to take the car to Chesterfield at 10:30 next Tuesday, 29 January, and wait in their comfortable customer space for about 90 minutes including a health check – and, I hope, a good clean! Because of the short notice, the £49 fee will be reduced to £35, and I thought being a Merc owner might be expensive!

### **Tuesday 22 January 2019**

I was up for the loo at 2:25am and not again until 7:05, which would have been a respectable time to get up, making the score for the night just one visit. However, I felt very weary indeed and decided to have a lie-in. I catnapped until just after 8am – a late rising time for me – but I felt much livelier and managed to sort myself out for the walk. It was a bright morning but cold at one degree, but the air was dry and I only felt the cold when walking south or west. We got round in just over 15 minutes.

After breakfast I had my weekly wrestling match with the bedding, followed by a beard trim, a shower and a quick run round with the little Vax cleaner.

Pat did an all-day breakfast for dinner, with some of the excellent bacon I have been getting from Sainsbury's.

I decided to go out and split some big logs down to provide kindling, which is always a satisfying job, and filled the bag with thicker ones to keep the fire going. Later on, with sleet and hail forecast, and family members reporting snow from further north, I lit the woodburner and our sittingroom got very cosy indeed.

### **Wednesday 23 January 2019**

I got up at about 7:30 this morning and listened to the 8 o'clock news before getting Bailey into his harness. The temperature was -2 degrees, but we went through the usual preparations. Once we got to the gate the problems started: the latch was frozen absolutely solid and I had to use Bailey's lead case to hammer it open. Then I tried the grip on the asphalt pavement and decided straight away that the ice was much too dangerous. I brought the poor old dog straight back in, with a couple of treats for compensation.

Bailey's no-pull harness was feeling very tight, so I did a bit of research and ordered him a new one from Amazon (where else?) this morning, along with a couple of different refills for the kitchen floor mop I bought fairly recently.

The weather was beautiful - still bitterly cold but I tackled the huge carton in which Barney's Christmas present - a bag for his guitar pedal board - arrived from Germany. This was getting on for the size of a coffin and was stuffed with long lengths of screwed-up brown paper. Working on the kitchen table, my Stanley knife (or box-cutter as the Americans call them) and I soon had it cut and folded along its corrugations, and slid down the sides of the blue recycling wheelie-bin, held in place by all the paper. There was another, smaller box to deal with and I had both stashed very quickly. This was a relief as I didn't want them to get wet and soggy in the wood shed.

Once this was done I cut some more kindling, concentrating on splitting the thinnest possible pieces off various logs with my felling axe. Practice seemed to be making improvements, if not perfect!

Nothing much else happened during the day, but at around 4:40pm I decided to light the fire. It soon caught and improved the homeliness of our sitting room enormously.

We decided to pass on dinner and had large slice of Christmas cake each with Cheddar and Red Leicester.

### **Thursday 24 January 2019**

The ground was deceptively treacherous this morning - worse even than yesterday. Our block paving looked fine but any attempt to walk on it compressed the fine coating of slush and was quite frightening. I decided to cancel the walk again, and later on I got a couple of large jam jars and filled them with fishmonger Darren's Red Sea sundried salt. This was a finger-chilling job in itself. While doing this I had warmed the car up,



which dealt with the ice on the windscreen very quickly, lifting the whole layer so the wipers could break it up.

We needed a bit of basic shopping but I decided to postpone this until the temperature rose to the forecast five degrees, which should happen by midday.

### **Monday 28 January 2019**

I haven't felt much need to record things recently. Life has gone on pretty routinely, with Alistair and the boys here over the weekend and leaving after breakfast yesterday. Afterwards Alistair dismantled and managed to bring back the huge climbing frame and slide which we bought for the boys years ago, which was necessary before Julie and the boys leave the rented house. We got that stashed before lunch, mostly in the summer house.

This morning was very cold at just one degree. I managed to make sense of the new harness I bought for Bailey and we had a brisk walk before breakfast. I was very glad to get back in the house and out of the dry but icy breezes.

Pat had a rather complicated visit to Anton's, with a new social worker for the deaf who is profoundly deaf herself being introduced to Anton. I agreed to go with her and met the amazing lady who had little or no intelligible speech and was accompanied by a brilliant (and rather lovely) interpreter whom we had met when she supported Anton on one of his hospital appointments. The meeting was a roaring success, with Anton allowing the new social worker, Sharon, into corners of his home which are normally out of bounds to anyone else – even Pat, because she isn't deaf! We came away feeling fairly optimistic (and hoping that pride won't come before a fall!).

### **Wednesday 30 January 2019**

Yesterday I had to get the car to Chesterfield Mercedes for its MoT, which was a little worrying in view of the weather. Pat came with me, and we got there easily in 45 minutes and settled down in the plush service reception. We were given hot drinks and had the choice of watching TV or reading, which I did using the Kindle app on my iPhone (it gives me much better performance than my poor old Kindle PaperWhite). I had thought that the MoT was covered by my £35-a-month service package, but it wasn't. However, it cost only £35, including a complimentary vehicle health check. The car passed both the check and the MoT with no advisories and there was zero feedback from the health check. It really does make sense to buy an upmarket car and to have it looked after by a main dealer.

With the temperature at -1 degree but lovely weather this morning, we had quite a good walk. I saw a very few tiny snowflakes fluttering down but there were very few slippery frost patches on the pavements.

Pat went out to an afternoon tea with her girlfriends, leaving me to enjoy a fairly lazy afternoon alone with the dog.

### **Thursday 31 January 2019**

The dog in question totally disgraced himself on the walk this morning. We were passing a near neighbour with his young black Labrador when Bailey went into full attack mode and, when I tried to restrain him managed to

slip his new harness, which I still haven't got properly adjusted. I managed to grab his collar and drag him away after clipping the lead to that for the rest of the walk. For some reason, he and Chazzer, as the Lab is called, have always been hostile towards one another, although our normally docile dog gets on fine with many other dogs whom we meet regularly. I will need to get the rather complicated harness properly adjusted, an hope to get a chance of a decent apology to Chazzer's owner, whose wife I have known in passing for quite a few years.

The temperature this morning was 4 degrees, but the air was dry and I didn't feel the cold very much. By coffee time, after a brief encounter with my felling axe, I soon had a good wood fire burning. With reasonable attention it was still doing well at 3:30pm.

The one bit of good news is that one of my several pensions – the enhancement of my teacher's pension for taking voluntary early retirement – hit the bank last night, lifting the balance into the black for the first time since the 21 January, if only to a miserable £3.89. Another much larger payment from my Teacher's Pension should arrive tomorrow, producing a much healthier balance of £660.17.

How much of this is maintained will depend on how much of the balances on my two credit cards I decide to repay this month. Christmas has ruined my long-term discipline of paying both cards off fully every month, to my shame. The MBNA Visa balance is £4407.53 and the Sainsbury's MasterCard balance is £1047.53. I have budgeted to repay £300 to each this month. If I keep that up the Sainsbury's card will soon be back under control, allowing me to pay more each month to MBNA...

Should we have bought a Mercedes? With a monthly repayment of £272.88 and a monthly service pack payment of £35, with a free subscription to Mercedes Rescue and the car's insanely low fuel costs (each time I visit the garage I can hardly remember the previous stop!), it really isn't all that extravagant!

I had a fight trying to fit a new letterbox kit to our UPVC front door. Pat had bought it and was convinced it would fit, but I ended up putting the battered (mostly by Bailey) inside flap back with its tiny screws.

After a cup of tea and a very light snack I sorted out some Maris Piper potatoes and got everything ready for a big dish of luxury mash. The potatoes were peeled and cut into smallish portions. The potato ricer and the bowl I prefer for mashing were laid out along with four ounces of butter, salt and ground white pepper. The spuds themselves were weighed into a microwave casserole ready to cook, mash and season. The mash would go with a Sainsbury's ready meal of casserole shin beef. I hoped this would be better than the curry meal we tried the other night, which was far too hot even for an asbestos palate cultivated with decades of heavy chilli consumption. It turned out to be delicious, as was my creamy mash.

### **Friday 1 February 2019**

I was restless from about 6:30am this morning after only my second pee of the night. I was worried about Bailey's battle and wondering how I could get the new harness adjusted properly so he won't be able to slip it again. I managed to stay in bed until 7:30 and then fitted experiments

with the harness into my normal morning routine. Normal, at least, except that I was reluctant to go walking and so, it seemed, was the dog. The cold snap with intermittent snow gave us a reasonable excuse!

After breakfast I had another woodchopping session as we burned almost everything in the basket yesterday. I refilled the basket and left another full bag in the conservatory. I lit the fire before lunch.

Then I did an online request for more of the diuretic Furosemide, as this seems to be working very well now and I want to keep it up until my next urology appointment on the 3 May. I also need to concentrate on using my recliner's leg-rest to keep my feet up when sitting.

More good financial news this morning was the arrival of four weeks' State Pension totalling over £650 in my account, lifting the balance to almost £615. The big one, my main Teacher's Pension payment of £890, will arrive later in the month, but by then I will have paid my Visa card and the car HP payment, so the end of the month will still see me overdrawn.

We shared the leftover stew and mash from last night. We had burned most of the wood in the basket before bed.

### **Saturday 2 February 2019**

We had a welcome lie-in on this bright but icy morning. I left Pat still enjoying her duvet time and decided that today was a porridge day. I made a large pan of good thick Scotts which went down very well with golden syrup and Yeo Valley organic whole milk.

After breakfast it was time to refill the log basket, so I went out into the cold but beautiful sunny morning, split enough logs to fill the basket and went out to do more to keep the big bag full. I laid the fire and cleaned round the stove, ready to light up later. When I was done Pat had yet another try at stopping the hearthrug moving on the carpet. All previous efforts had failed, so she tried some super-heavy-duty double-sided tape. We will see...

The rug stayed roughly where it should, but with edges of tape peeping out – she should have put the tape further from the edges. It was certainly more stable than before, though.

The fire burned well all afternoon and evening, making the room very comfortable right through to bedtime.

We had some very pleasant little pots of sea-food in a sauce from Sainsbury's, with McCain's French Fries cooked in the dry fryer and a bottle of Laithwaites' own Bordeaux Sauvignon Blanc. We had a little tub of Sainsburys' crème caramel for afters. Our plan to be lazier about what we cook for ourselves is progressing...

### **Sunday 3 February 2019**

Pat's Monday visit to Anton was moved from tomorrow to today, as she has a much waited-for orthopaedic appointment tomorrow, so our usual Sunday lie-in didn't happen.

I managed to squeeze a pan of porridge into her timetable, though, and the weather wasn't too bad. Pretty well all the thin layer of lying snow from yesterday had melted in the glorious sunshine, and when I went out to scrape the car windscreen I found that the ice had already softened. I

warmed the engine up, turned the car round and opened the gates ready for her departure.

While she was cooking, I cleared the woodburner out and re-laid it with what kindling was left in the basket before going out yet again to swing my mighty felling axe. Practice has made me pretty accurate with it. I am beginning to wonder whether our store of logs will get us through the winter, as we have already used around a third of last year's delivery. Realistically, though, we should be moving into more spring-like weather fairly soon. The BBC weather website is showing far fewer negative temperatures over the next few weeks...

### **Tuesday 5 February 2019**

I was up bright and early this morning to get ready for the arrival of our tree man, Steve, and his sidekick. The temperature was just on zero, with ice on the car windscreen hard enough so that I couldn't scrape it off. I needed to move the car into the corner of the driveway to make room for the team. I expected to use the reversing camera but the lens was obscured by ice. I jiggled around carefully, but not carefully enough because I caught the corner of the rear bumper on the brick wall, scraping the paint and putting quite a deep dent in the corner – again! Nothing as dreadful as last time, but still enough for an insurance claim. I thought we had special cover for small blemishes as part of the dealer's warranty, but when I explored the file there didn't seem to be anything useful – except back to Aviva!

Steve and his mate cut and shifted a vast amount of stuff, all of which had to be carried from the big back garden, through the alley at the side of the house and out across the driveway to their monster Land Rover pickup and trailer. Steve decided that they would have to come back tomorrow morning to do the front garden.

The agreed charge was £300, and I decided to cover this with equal cash withdrawals from my two credit cards. A visit to the ATM in the local shop delivered the necessary cash.

Dinner was a Co-op Three-Cheese Pasta Bake – pretty ordinary.

### **Thursday 6 February 2019**

I started the Aviva claim process yesterday. It seemed less helpful for relatively small damage than it had been after the previous smash, and I got pretty frustrated. I am going to have a word with our Mercedes garage in Chesterfield later.

I was restless from around 6am this morning and got up at 7:10. It was getting light with a temperature of four degrees and some noisy wind. There had been quite a bit of rain on the windows during the night but this seemed to have stopped, so I decided to try a walk. We did the short route, finding the south-westerly head-winds pretty fierce and cold, with what I decided were probably gale-force gusts, and we were very glad to finish in about 14½ minutes. We only met the long-haired shepherd, who still seems very young and nervous of Bailey.

### **Monday 11 February 2019**

I think my motivation for keeping this diary is waning, certainly for conscientiously writing an entry every day. Maybe it's just that life is

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getting more boring and I really can't be bothered to document the increasing tedium. So the discipline of daily entries is going to be replaced by much more haphazard writing – if any.

Today started with the usual routine, with a decent 15¾-minute walk on two reasonably forgiving feet for once, punctuated only by a friendly encounter with the Woolly Shepherd. It was a pleasant, dry morning with a temperature of four degrees, though the wind as we walked in some directions was a bit biting.

This morning, once Pat has gone off to see Anton, will be occupied by an attempt to find a better location for the wire DAB aerial we use with the new Panasonic stereo in the kitchen. I have noticed that, when I am close to this, the radio reception gets just a little crackly and I want to eliminate that. Step one will be to raise the wire dipole as high as possible in the corner of the wall behind the unit.

Meanwhile, I did my usual budget check with the current-account spreadsheet and the bank's much-improved website. Everything was well under control with the projection for the rest of February holding together well. I have already paid £300 on the MBNA Visa and am due to do the same on the Sainsbury's MasterCard account on the 22 February. The plan is to keep this payment up until I can get back to paying the full balances on both accounts as I was doing before.

The radio aerial job was awkward because of the location into which I had decided to relocate it, but it was worth teetering on a little stepladder for about half an hour because the DAB Radio 4 signal came in crystal clearly with not a crackle to be heard.

I finally got round to phoning the finance company which Pat's brother-in-law used to set up Equity Release on his and Jackie's house. I left a message for his advisor, Claire Winchurch. This was prompted by a promotional mailing from Age Partnership. She called back later and will be coming to meet us next Wednesday (20 February) at between 3pm and 3:30. The plan will be to draw a large sum against the value of the house and invest it in an account that pays good interest and allows withdrawals whenever a larger sum is needed – for example, to put a solid roof on our coinservatory, and repay the balance of the car and furniture loans among other measures to increase our ready cash.

I am waiting to hear from the vehicle repairer to sort out the repair to the Merc and the courtesy car, which is supposed to be happening tomorrow.

## **Tuesday 12 February 2019**

On another cold but pleasant morning Bailey and I had another good walk, taking 16¼ minutes to get round

I emailed Aviva's enquiry line before lunch to ask why nobody has been in touch from the repairers. I'm not really bothered, as the car is perfectly serviceable and it doesn't really matter when the bumper is repaired – as long as it *does* get done. I got a message back to say that they had chased them. I phoned the repairers and they apologised for any misunderstanding and booked Friday first-thing for the assessor to visit.

For some reason I had been getting rather worried about the lack of progress, to the extent of 'wittling' endlessly about it between waking up

(any time from 4am) to getting up. I told myself that this was only a relatively minor dent in the car and that it was fully roadworthy, but I still went on brooding about it.

### **Thursday 14 February 2019**

After I had a good walk with Bailey, we exchanged Valentine cards and presents after breakfast and then got ready for our celebration lunch at Rocco's Kitchen in nearby Tickhill. We had the *Mare Arabella* again – as rich mix of shrimps, prawns and scallops with black *taglione* pasta in a rich and delicious butter sauce. After that we managed light but delicious desserts and went home to watch the delicious Audrey Hepburn in *Charade* as a celebration treat. Unsurprisingly, we passed on dinner!

### **Friday 15 February 2019**

My sleep was punctuated by five trips to the loo after my diuretic régime was cancelled by yesterday's long and lovely lunch.

We started out for a walk earlier on this very frosty morning, with no slippery patches on the pavement, but both my feet and lower legs had put a painful stop to that after only four minutes.

The repairers' assessor – all 6-feet six inches of him, at least! - arrived here at 8:25 this morning and was gone by 8:40, assuring me that all that was needed were a new back bumper and nearside rear-light lens. That was good to hear and now I only need to get the repair booked on a collect-and-return basis and ensure that Enterprise would deliver my courtesy car (*not* the appalling Renault Captur they lent me last time).

I managed to get something done yesterday which I have been intending to do for ages: setting Pat up with her debit card for our joint current account and creating her an ID for the online banking. I hadn't managed this until, for the first time, I accidentally saw a form on the site to create a new used ID.

In the afternoon sunshine, we started clearing the trail of leaves and twigs left behind by our tree men, concentrating on the driveway and the path down the side of the house to begin with. We were both pretty weary by the time we had everything fairly tidy.

Dinner was fish and chips from the local chippie – easy but not very good.

### **Saturday 16 February 2019**

My last pee (of just three this time with the help of the diuretic) was at about 6:05am and I didn't get back to sleep in spite of looking forward to a weekend lie-in. Instead, I pondered at length with plans to use the money which will be liberated by the equity release plan we hope to negotiate with brother-in-law Bob's financial adviser on Wednesday.

The core idea is to place however much money we get in an investment account of some sort which will pay a good rate of interest into either the same account or our current account.

Most important, we will be able to pay off the two credit accounts which are attacking our balance – one for the two sofas and a much bigger one for the car. This will save a total of about £310 a month.

Other important possibilities include a new conservatory with a roof that doesn't leak in heavy rain (by coincidence, this was the first thing Bob and Jackie did with their equity release!). I want a solid tiled roof with a couple of big Velux skylights to replace the polycarbonate panels. We have a leaflet which says we would get free new window frames if we have a roof!

Having got into this groove, I decided that we should have a new kitchen. Our inherited 'range' cooker really is pretty knackered and Pat thinks the solid oak doors are terribly out-of-date (I just think they are classic, but they are looking pretty weary!). Then there is the possibility of having a regular gardener to save us all the slog of keeping the 'estate' in good trim in our old age. And so it went on...

### **Monday 18 February 2019**

I got up for a pee at 7:15 this morning and would normally have stayed up, but I felt really tired and decided to modify my morning timetable a little. I got up in time for the 7:30 news summary on Radio 4 and took my time getting through the essentials, taking Bailey out after the 8am news. The temperature was around 10 degrees but the brisk breeze was quite sharp whenever we walked into it.

After breakfast, while Pat was cooking Anton's brunch, I went up and tackled the beds, finishing shortly after she left which meant that my scheduled shower would have to wait until after she was back in case I missed a delivery or a phone call.

The rest of the morning was TV news reporting on the resignation of seven Labour MPs, with whom I sympathised thoroughly. I voted against Corbyn in the leadership election (Andy Burnham was my candidate of choice), so I was totally sympathetic with the new 'Independent Group'. I hope they will attract more members, which could eventually bring Corbyn down. In my opinion he is far too committed to supporting any national leader who professes to be of the left, even if he is a vicious fascist dictator somewhere in Latin America or Africa.

I actually managed to take my diuretic half-tablet *before* the alarm on my phone went off today!

Finally, at about 2:30pm today I got a call from the vehicle repairers and booked for them to collect the car on Wednesday 27 February. No low-loader this time – they will drive it away. They will also notify Enterprise that I will need a replacement car.

I eventually got my shower and shave in the middle of the afternoon.

### **Tuesday 19 February 2019**

Bad news this morning: before the walk I put on the big plastic digital watch which I bought when we went to Normandy ages ago and saw that the display was blank, so no stopwatch. I have never quite mastered the stopwatch function on my wonderful Casio watch, so I was unable to time the walk. I planned to get the instruction book out later and see if I can crack this function, and if not would order something from Amazon. A few minutes after typing this I tried a few button-pushes and managed to get the stopwatch working! The small digital display isn't exactly hi-viz, so I decided to buy something a bit friendlier.

I had a look at Amazon and found dozens of cheap instruments, and it dawned on me that getting one with a lanyard might give me a more secure cord for my door key than the secondhand walking-shoe lace I use at the moment. My mild paranoia dictates that I never go out without the phone (a rule I try desperately to impose on Pat, particularly when she is taking the car) or a front-door key (in case I have a problem and Pat, who is quite hard of hearing, doesn't hear the doorbell after I have made my way home). I don't take my keyring with the very expensive Mercedes key on unless I am driving, as I would hate it to fall out of my pocket.

The walk was very pleasant and relaxed, with my erratic left foot behaving fairly well on a mild, dull morning, only punctuated by a meeting with the woolly shepherd, who is still quite nervous of our big soft doggy. After a few minutes I discovered that my phone was not in my jacket pocket, breaking my unbreakable rule of never going out without it. Only when we got home did I find it in my trouser pocket!

Later on I picked a fairly chunky stopwatch with a large dial on a cord for £7.99 on Amazon Prime, which should arrive tomorrow. Thank Heaven for the amazing Chinese electronics industry! To tide myself over I fiddled with the Casio's stopwatch function and finally figured it out.

Later still I checked a letter I had received from Laithwaites, the wine merchants with whom I have at least one if not two plans, which explains the almost embarrassing stocks stacked in the garage! I found the address of the web page that would allow me to modify the plans, discovered that my plan only repeats every 12 weeks and made a couple of minor tweaks, one to ensure a steady supply of the rich and velvety Cabalié red.

### **Wednesday 20 February 2019**

I had a long but comfortable and relaxed couple of hours before getting up at about 7:15 this morning. I spent quite a lot of time getting me head round the equity-release package we will, I hope, be setting up this afternoon. It occurred to me that we might be able to give our heirs much of their inheritances before we died, which is an odd notion!

This morning was dull and mild, but with a hint of rain and a damp nip in the breeze as we walked into it. Our en-suite window had already warned me of rain.

I managed with the Casio's stopwatch function, except that I forgot to start it when we set out (because I had to bring in the wheelie-bin) and needed to add a minute when I logged the time.

Claire from the finance company turned out to be a big, loud, friendly and cheerful character who explained our equity-release options thoroughly. She took all our relevant data and arranged to come back on the 14 March with a clear report on our options. We think it will be a good move to use some of the thousands which are tied up in the house...

### **Thursday 21 February 2019**

I tried the new stopwatch out on our walk this mild, dull morning, making a mental note of the 15 minutes 5 seconds reading, which was a good thing because I somehow managed to press the rather over-sensitive reset button when I was unlocking the front door. Giving me a reading of



all zeroes! The lanyard was rather short to have the watch on one end and the key on the other so I gave the key its own cord which could be threaded through the other.

Alistair brought the boys over for a long weekend this morning, so the kitchen became a craft workshop. One spin-off from this was that Alistair thought he remembered seeing a glue-gun (something Tom was asking for) hanging in the garage, and to my amazement there it was – I must have been seeing and ignoring it for years. I couldn't even remember why I bought it 15 or so years ago! Amazingly, it still worked.

### **Saturday 23 February 2019**

I managed the new stopwatch well this morning, recording a time of 17 minutes 36 seconds for a longer-than-usual walk.

I did a big shop for a snacky lunch and a teatime buffet for when Heather brought her girls and the tiny dog which she and Alistair acquired recently. She was a lively little soul and held her own with the enormous Bailey very well, teasing him when she hid and leaving him gasping from chasing her. No-one was hurt and I think they parted good friends.

The rest of the day was anxious because Barney needed elbow surgery after a silly fall. This would be greatly complicated by his recent history of open-heart surgery, so the hospital in Huddersfield had to liaise closely with the heart surgeons in Leeds. It was also complicated for Barney because he was due to do the presentation for his finals at university.

### **Sunday 24 February 2019**

Pat got Alistair and the boys fed and on the road before I got up from my Sunday lie-in.

We were still waiting for news of Barney by the time we had a cup of tea at 4pm today, and heard that he had had his surgery later. Pat was eager to go and see him, so we planned the trip to Dreaded Huddersfield, The Driver's Nightmare, for tomorrow. We left them there, but we heard later that he wouldn't let them in.

### **Monday 25 February 2019**

We started our trip with a short visit to Anton's. This turned out to be a nightmare, first because his fax had jammed and hadn't printed my usual evening warning, so he wasn't expecting us. It got even worse when his new social worker and her sign interpreter arrived.

Huddersfield Royal Infirmary turned out to be right across the city from the M1, but James – the voice of our Garmin satnav – got us there after a pretty exhausting drive. The entrance he got us to turned out to be a security one, and right on the wrong side of what turned out to be a vast campus, but the barrier let us in. A notice said we would need to get a ticket from reception and use it to pay at a machine before leaving. We found the man entrance and reception eventually and navigated ourselves to Barney's small room, shared with only one other patient.

Our boy had a cast on his elbow and his whole arm was bandaged, but he seemed fairly comfortable and we spent a pleasant couple of hours with him, during which he explained how he had deferred his immediate university commitments and what his plans were for after graduation.

We found our way back to reception, where we got a parking ticket and then to the right road which took us back to the car. The machine computed our times (though with a generous arrival time, presumably) and accepted our money. The ticket got the barrier raised and James took us back through the chaotic city traffic and out of the city. The rest was easy, and it was a great relief to get back on the dear old M1. It was an even greater relief to get back home for a lazy leftover-salad dinner and an early night.

### **Tuesday 26 February 2019**

We had another pretty exhausting day today, mostly occupied with clearing rubbish from the garden.

I cleared everything loose out of the car ready for its trip to the repairers tomorrow and prepared it for loading, putting the rear seat backs down and lining the cargo space with a clean plastic tarpaulin before dragging two huge builder's bags up the garden.

These had been sitting in the shelter of the summer-house veranda for several months. One was stuffed very full and was very heavy, but the other was a little less challenging. I heaved the easy one into the back of the car and then managed to lift the heavier one, gripping low down on each side and stooping low to get control. I also filled our largest old French polypropylene supermarket shopping bag with waste glass – mostly quite a scary number empty wine bottles. Had I really sunk so much wine over the months...?

There was no room in the back for the bottle bag so it travelled in the passenger footwell. I got rid of the glass as soon as I parked at the tip and found, to my relief, that the green waste skip was empty. The lighter bag emptied quite easily, and I was relieved to find that I could get the heavy one onto the skip's edge and hold it by one bottom edge. I emptied with a few shakes.

I was very tired from the two days' exertion and was glad at last to hit the sack.

### **Wednesday 27 February 2019**

The car was due to be collected for repair this morning, so I woke up very early and was able to snooze for a long time. I couldn't risk missing the collection, so I had to cancel the walk, and nothing happened before breakfast. A while afterwards the car hire firm phoned, and when I said the collection hadn't yet been promised they said they would bring the courtesy car anyway. It turned out to be a Vauxhall Mokka – a large 'sort-of SUV'. I brought it back from town and found it surprisingly pleasant to drive.

Some time later the repairers' team arrived and surveyed the car very thoroughly before driving it away, leaving me feeling very weary again.

I had a small spell of vigorous work to taper me off from the rest of the week when I changed the fitted sheets (quite a wrestle!) and pillowcases on our beds. I had put my goose-down pillows in the tumble-drier earlier and they had puffed up really well.

Towards dinner time I went out to the garage for a bottle of white wine, and somehow I managed to trip on the back doorstep and land on my left

elbow and my right shin, bashing them against the edges of the doorstep and frame. I would probably have done less damage if I had let the bottle drop, but instinct ruled! The elbow and forearm were scraped and bloody, so I wiped them off and applied Savlon cream.

When I got up from my chair after a longish evening of TV I could hardly stand. Both feet were very weak and painful, and I had a real struggle to sort the dog out, shut the house down for the night and get myself upstairs. The pain did ease before the first of the night's trips to the loo. This is a stiffening process so I probably ought to get up and have a little wander several times during the evening.

### **Thursday 28 February 2019**

My right shoulder has been getting more painful recently. I keep telling myself to get into an exercise routine but I keep forgetting – as if I have so much important stuff to do!

I was awake early but pleasantly drowsy this morning and went off into some quite fascinating reminiscences, including a recap of my long relationship with Sylvie, the French *au pair* with whom I started at the age of 16 to explore physical and emotional love. It was the shoulder that forced me to get out of bed at about 7:15.

The elbow and forearm had dried up nicely overnight, but my right shin was quite painful. The soles of my feet felt bruised when I came downstairs, but this eased as I went through the usual morning routine and I felt able to take the dog for a walk. I shortened the route by a couple of hundred metres and we got back in 16 minutes 42 seconds.

A little later I actually *did* do a full round of neck and shoulder exercises.

I took Pat up the the dentist in the Mokka and decided it was actually quite a good drive, though I had trouble finding the wipers when t suddenly started raining quite hard on the way home.

I couldn't find any paperwork with the car so I rang Enterprise. They said they didn't issue hard-copy and directed me to my email, where I found the agreement and printed it for my wallet. What do people with no Internet access do, I wonder?

### **Friday 1 March 2019**

Nominally the first day of spring today. The tmperature was close to ten degrees when I came downstairs and we had a pleasant walk, finishing the longest of the present routes in 17 minutes 13 seconds without too much pain, though the dodgy right ankle and its associated shin (bruised from my fall) were far from comfortable.

I went out this morning to figure the Mokka's lights out, as we are eating at Aidan's on Saturday and may have a late drive home. The controls on the steering wheel aren't exactly self-explanatory!

I logged on to the Aviva repair line and was pleased to see that the repairer expected to finish the car on Tuesday. I did the exercises again to celebrate.

We decided to have the rather unexciting fish and chips from the local shop tonight. They weren't too bad.

## **Saturday 2 March 2019**

Aidan planned to bring Barney down to his and Donni's place for the weekend and we invited them to come over to us for a meal. I was keen to do a proper roast chicken dinner with all the trimmings. Later on Aidan decided to invite us to them for a curry on Saturday night. I was a bit reluctant because it is a longish drive on mostly-unlit country roads to and from their place on this side of Rotherham. Pat hadn't yet driven the Mokka and I hadn't driven it in the dark. Worse, I didn't think I had even driven the *Merc* in the dark yet, though Pat had done so once or twice.

As usual Pat would not refuse any suggestion, request of invitation from one of her boys, so I drove us over via the Co-op in the mid-afternoon. I had fiddled with the control levers for the lights and wipers, but I wasn't yet quite sure of what did what.

After a really good curry which Aidan and Donni had conjured up, and lots of chat with Barney who was managing fairly well with his right arm in a cast, Pat spotted my restlessness and suggested we should hit the road. The drive turned out to be fairly easy, with loads of cats' eyes to bounce our lights back at us. The Mokka's lights were pretty good, and I managed to get us home quite quickly and easily. That's not to say I wasn't relieved to park on our driveway and get indoors to an insane display of ecstasy by Bailey, who had obviously missed us badly. For my first night drive in ages, in a totally unfamiliar car, I thought this 76-year-old had done pretty well, and my general confidence had taken a big boost. But with this test added to the rest of the week's challenges and hard tasks I felt totally knackered and was delighted to get to bed.

When I went upstairs to bed I was greeted by everything a bit loose on the outside of the house banging around in the gale.

## **Monday 4 March 2019**

Sunday was uneventful, but I managed to do a decent roast chicken with roast potatoes, gravy, slim carrots and pointy cabbage. Aidan didn't know what he was missing!

I was pretty sure I had forgotten to take the diuretic yesterday, and after getting up to pee five times through last night I was forced to get up at 7:10am by the sixth. I felt pleasantly weary and physically relaxed and would have loved to stay in bed longer, but it really was a bit late to get back in, and last night ended as just a five-pee night.

Bailey and I had a normal early morning, with a walk lasting 16 minute 22 seconds. My legs, feet and ankles all felt pretty battered, but I managed without real difficulty. When I got home I rubbed a hefty squeeze of Ibuprofen gel into the right shin (still bruised from the other day's tumble) and foot, and the pain eased quite a bit.

I got an email timed at 9:35am saying that the repairs to the car had been completed and the contractors would be contacting me soon to arrange its return. I hadn't heard anything by midday.

Pat had a call from Rachael (who runs Anton's personal asistant service) and at the end of it she was really tense. She had tried moving the Mokka around the driveway and seemed confident with it, so although I offered to drive her to Anton's she insisted on managing alone because she

thought he might throw another tantrum if I turned up. Having ensured that she had her phone with her this time I asked her to text me when she arrived, and in fact she called before she had gone in.

She came back quite upset because Anton was being very difficult.

I put the new brown wheelie-bin for garden refuse out for its first collection tomorrow morning.

Then I started to pay my MBNA Visa card bill and found that some cretin had decided to redesign the whole of the website, in both appearance and functionality. The process took me about five times as long as it had using their old site. Bloody techies!

At 4:35pm I hadn't heard from the car repairers...

We had cold roast chicken with reheated carrots and cabbage and a dollop of gravy for dinner – very tasty.

### **Tuesday 5 March 2019**

We had the best of the weather for our walk (17 minutes 7 seconds) – bright, fresh and cool with a little sunshine. It became very dull later in spite of forecasts of sunny intervals.

I did my usual wrestle with the beds and later ordered a pair of new top-quality Egyptian cotton pillow cases because all our are getting very old and worn. I found the ones I wanted on Ebay and got a nice 'welcome back' from the Asian supplier from whom I bought our excellent fitted sheets several years ago. If the new ones are up to expectations I'll get another two in a couple of weeks.

Pat had a terrible struggle with the PC, trying to print out the documentation for the travel insurance she had just bought. Eventually after many redundant pages the PC seized up completely, so she phoned the company and ordered the paperwork directly. I think the PC is going to have to go...

I got a call shortly before lunchtime to say that the repairers could return the Merc tomorrow morning. I checked with Pat and we said 'Yes, please!'. I then got a call from Enterprise saying the insurers had terminated the Mokka rental prematurely and I had to phone Aviva to sort this out. I emptied all our bits out of the Mokka ready to transfer back into the Merc.

### **Wednesday 6 March 2019**

My early-morning brood was a very confused one about the plan for the start of the day: (1) welcome the Merc home; (2) phone Enterprise to ask if they would be able to drive me home if I took the Mokka back; (3) if they could, take it to Sainsburys' garage and fill the tank right upback as soon as the Merc was back on the driveway; (4) take the Mokka home and enjoy a chat with the young driver; (5) go to Sainsbury's in the Merc and do a bit of urgent shopping...

Round and round it all went in my head until I decided to get up. A bit later Pat shouted down that she had taken a call upstairs saying the Merc was on its way.

I paid my £350 excess on the repairers' driver's mobile with my credit card, and as soon as the Mokka was on its way I did my shopping at

Sainsbury's as planned. I brought back a mountain of stuff in the Merc, and then we had a light lunch of crisps and bits. I wanted to get the stuff I had transferred from the Merc into the Mokka before the repair back- into the Merc but we had a fairly violent Spring rainstorm around lunchtime.

My verdict on the morning: the repair was much better quality than the last. The finish was immaculate, and closing the tailgate produced a much for convincing THUNK! than it had before.

### **Thursday 7 March 2019**

This morning was quite windy and chilly, but we managed the usual walk in 17 minutes 34 seconds. If I can keep this up this week will be the first with a full set of five matching times for ages.

### **Friday 8 March 2019**

And I did. Bailey and I got round our lap in 17 minutes 44 seconds on a bright breezy morning with a temperature just above zero. That gave a week's average of 17 minutes 9 seconds and a total of 1 minute 25<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> seconds.

We had a trip to Welbeck this morning to shop in the farm shop and buy some birthday cards. Some of the shopping was aimed at Ewan and Tom who will be with us late this afternoon, but we ended the morning with a lunch of pork-and-stilton pie (mine!) and a huge sausage roll (Pat's), followed by a delicious jam tart for each of us. On the way back we stopped at Sainsbury's for a few essentials. When I shopped on Wednesday I spotted some spiced oven fries which I thought Tom, at least, would enjoy, so I picked up two different bags (mild and fierce) along with the rest of the shopping.

I have really enjoyed driving the Merc in the last couple of days. The Mokka was OK but our car is a bit more special. Oh for a proper hand-brake, but I have got a grip on the Merc's hill-start assist now.

### **Sunday 10 March 2019**

Last night's dinner was Welbeck Farm Shop meat pies with the two kinds of spicy fries I bought at Sainsbury's on Friday. The hot ones were rather too hot and the just-spicy ones weren't hot at all, so the meal didn't thrill any of us really.

I got up just before 9am after a long lie-in this morning to find that Alistair and yhr boys had left for Buxton and Ju-Jitsu. We needed a very few groceries, so rather than walk to the paper shop I took the car and got the food and the papers. My left foot was quite painful, so I hoped a lazy day would ease it out. It did, but not completely.

Having had a snack at lunchtime neither of us felt like eating in the evening, so Pat suggested – perhaps jokingly, because she used to eat cereals in lieu of meals when she worked as a house manager! - a boel of porridge. This didn't seem such a daft idea, so that was what we had, made with whole milk instead of water. It was filling and pleasant and sent us off to bed feeling well fed.

### **Monday 11 March 2019**

I felt quite groggy before it was time to get up, as I often do, and I wondered whether my blood sugar was dipping or something. I

remembered that I was in the habit of drinking a whole glass of milk with a digestive biscuit at bedtime before I settled with Pat, so I decided that I will try this from tonight, with whatever fairly plain biscuit I can find – a ginger nut, perhaps, though they are rather sugary.

I felt reasonable by the time I got downstairs towards 7:30, and we had a decent walk even with the temperature at four degrees and a very brisk north-westerly wind blowing. We finished the current route in 17½ minutes and I had everything ready for breakfast before Pat came down to get ready for her weekly visit to Anton. After a bit of hunting in the kitchen cupboards I found a packet of fruit shortcake biscuits, which I used to like years ago. They will do for a trial.

Before Pat left, she got a call saying Anton's new social worker and her sign interpreter would be trying another visit this morning. She wasn't pleased because the last attempt two weeks ago had really brought out the worst in Anton and hadn't done him – or anyone else! – any good whatever.

I spent quite a lot of the morning trying to repair a kitchen chair, but found it very difficult to deal with. It would need at least two pairs of hands.

I had two fruit shortcake biscuits and a full 250ml glass of semi-skimmed milk just before bed, much to Bailey's confusion.

## **Tuesday 12 March 2019**

There was no walking weather this morning, and because the engineer from HomeServe would be coming to sort out the taps there was no time either.

I spent quite a lot of time and effort opening up the bathroom floor up to give access to the mains stop-tap. The Karndean flooring put up quite a battle but I managed in the end.

The engineer was supposed to come between 10am and 1pm but with only a short time left before 1pm he still hadn't phoned. I sent a text to his office and within minutes he called and arrived a little later. Our fancy 'antique' brass-plated taps proved very difficult for him to dismantle and the bidet ended up with no cold water from its mixer/spray – just hot enough to blister my bum. I wasn't very clear what he thought when he left, as he had been talking about me buying new taps for them to install.

## **Wednesday 13 March 2019**

I had added the lack of cold water for the bidet to my usual list of early-morning worries, but I managed my toilet functions with an Andrex flushable wet wipe in place of my usual bidet spray this morning.

The morning was cold and windy but not as bad as yesterday – until we got out onto the pavement when the westerly gale started doing its best to blow me off my feet. After a couple of hundred metres and losing my balance several times (wind aided by dog) I turned round and leaned into the wind and went all the way back, clocking a miserable time of 3 minutes 40 seconds.

After breakfast I went up to change the fitted sheets on our beds – always a good bit of exercise. I left my lovely new pillowcases on for a second

week. I to push the boat out and order another pair for about £20 because any others are going to feel a bit nasty after these 80 thread-count Egyptian cotton ones, which combine perfectly with my two pure white goose down pillows, allowing me to swop pillows through the night.

I helped Pat to use our GPs' *Ask My GP* online facility to get an appointment to have a strange lesion on her knee looked at. She came back with some special dressings from the practice nurse and an appointment to have the thing checked at the hospital next week.

I had a delivery of yet another dozen bottles of wine and managed to carry the box through to the kitchen, from where I took four at a time out to the garage in a strong shopping bag. Then I went down to the pond and cleared the pump intake grilles as the fountain needed a helping hand.

The wind had eased a little by 2pm, but was still pretty gusty.

I have been keeping a fairly close eye on the Brexit developments, hoping the The Commons will be totally unable to make Farage & Co's deranged dream come true. I was amused to see on TV that the absurd Boris finally seems to have discovered the haircut – still scruffy but nowhere near as silly as he looked before.

I spent quite a bit of time today with my bank account spreadsheet, and I think I'm beginning to get on top of things (famous last words!). Knocking £300 off each credit card debt each month feels quite good.

For dinner, Pat had made a very tasty cottage pie, served with baked beans (Branston – not sugary Heinz) and leftover gravy.

#### **Thursday 14 March 2019**

Today began with another worry about the bidet, so I decided I would phone HomeServe after breakfast, because the engineer had only *hoped* he would be able to find replacement parts for our bathroom taps.

We had even more horrible weather than yesterday, with steady and sometimes quite heavy rain and constant gusts of gale-force wind, so I didn't even think of walking once I had looked out of the window.

In spite of what should have been a pretty laxative dinner last night and two Senocot tablets at bedtime, my bowels had gone on strike – a very rare occurrence indeed these days. At around 10am I decided to give them another try and with a worrying amount of muscular effort I managed to get things moving without bloodshed.

After this success I phoned HomeServe and to my relief a helpful agent confirmed that the engineer had put in a parts order when he got back to the office from here and that the bits should arrive direct to our address in a couple of days.

Before coffee I went down the garden to collect several days' dog poos. These had been in the rain for most of their lives so getting them lifted was far from easy! The wind provided an added obstacle, meaning that I had to pull both handles of each bag up my right arm and hold them there tightly with my left hand when lifting the nasties. The landfill bin absorbed several pounds of Bailey's Best.



Pat has an appointment for an MRI scan on her lower back at 7:20pm this evening. This should be less shattering as the head scan I had some time ago for my ophthalmology consultant. I need to do some shopping for basics but I turned down Pat's suggestion of combining this with her appointment. The weather is forecast to calm down at around 4pm, so I will go then.

I have been editing the bank spreadsheet every day, and the future is looking quite good. The current account balance is £321.22 overdrawn but is forecast to finish March with a credit balance of £1,144.37 provided only the direct debits and other planned items go out, which is probably unlikely! With the same reservations, the end-of-April forecast is £1,429.79. Both these figures take account of payments of £300 to nibble away at the MBNA Visa and Sainsbury's MasterCard accounts, which are owed about £6000 – a situation we have never had before. Thanks a bunch, Christmas and buying a Merc!

Claire the equity-release adviser arrived after lunch with her proposal for us. The figures looked very attractive but the details were quite confusing.

We headed out to the hospital at about 6:40, which gave me my first chance to get to grips with the Merc's lights, which are all controlled by the indicator and wiper stalk. I keep the light switch on the dashboard set to AUTO all the time and it seems to work as follows. The system detects the fall in light towards dusk. The parking lights come on automatically when needed and when we unlock the doors the whole system lights up. For regular driving we only need to use the flash and dip functions, also with the indicator stalk. Easy once you get it, and I found the drives to the hospital and back, almost entirely on unlighted country roads, quite painless.

Pat was called almost an hour early for her MRI scan, but it took well over an hour. She said the experience wasn't unduly difficult.

### **Friday 14 March 2019**

Last night was very noisy with violent squalls, and when I got up I found that today's wind speeds were forecast to peak at 52 miles per hour, so once again I decided not to try walking with Bailey.

By midday, with wind at that peak, the forecast was for it to drop quite abruptly through the 40's and to reach 23mph by 4pm and an amazing 9mph in the small hours. Tomorrow's forecast was for 'Strong winds and heavy rain', with the gales coming back into the 40's at around 11am and then dropping back into the 20's towards 7pm. Sunday looks chilly but only breezy.

Pat came downstairs with her back in a very bad spasm this morning. She didn't think the scan had anything to do with it and that she would just have to take things very easy.

That left me in my nursing rôle for the day, and nothing very dramatic happened.

### **Sunday 17 March 2019**

Pat was a little better today but I had to try and stop her doing unnecessary bending and twisting. It looked as if I was going to have to do the Monday Anton visit tomorrow.

### **Monday 18 March 2019**

As it turned out I drove her to Anton's this morning. He had a visit from his new social worker, Sharon, who is profoundly deaf and her sign interpreter Bex. Anton co-operated with Sharon quite well this time and we left feeling quite encouraged.

### **Tuesday 19 March 2019**

I spent quite a lot of time solving the problems of our bathroom, which is getting attention from HomeServe insurance. The bidet tap was knackered, which meant I had to deal with my bottom using toilet roll and flushable wet wipes instead of warm soapy water. I did a lot of web-hunting and by end-of-play I had found what looked like a perfect replacement bidet mixer/spray.

### **Wednesday 20 March 2019**

I ordered the tap before breakfast this morning for £130 from Victorian Plumbing.

This afternoon I dragged the mighty Atco Admiral petrol mower out of the shambles in the shed, and after I had topped up the tank it started with the first pull of the cord after several months of neglect

The weather was quite summery and by the time I had cut the whole of the large lawn I was sweating copiously. With all the assorted clumps of grass cut down to size the lawn looked somewhere near respectable.

### **Thursday 21 March 2019**

This morning was complicated because the bidet tap was due to arrive between 10:32 and 11:32am according to the text notification and Pat had a hospital appointment at 8:30. The HomeServe guy was supposed to get to us between 12 and 6pm, so all in all the day would take a bit of organising. As it happened, we were well back from the hospital before the tap arrived and had quite a bit of time before the plumber got to us. He managed to get the old tap off, cannibalised the hot and cold heads and housings to transfer to the basin, and had the whole thing working fine by 2:30pm.

So, all in all, quite a constructive week so far!

At 3:15pm I tried to sign the online petition asking the Government to revoke Article 50 and keep us in the EU, but the site had collapsed under the weight of around 1 million 700 thousand signatures! Since then I have been keeping an eye on progress and seen votes being clocked up in regular and quite large batches. For some reason I haven't been able to register my own vote. Before we broke for dinner the total had almost reached 1,150,000.

### **Monday 25 March 2019**

We had Alistair and the boys from Friday evening until Sunday morning, and Heather brought her two girls and their new little dog on Saturday afternoon. Bailey and Elle had a wonderful time together with endless play-fighting and no harm done.

We wore ourselves out buying, preparing and serving party food, and a good time was had all around.

Pat got 'the three boys' laundered and breakfasted in time to leave for their Sunday morning ju-jitsu session back home in Buxton. I'm sure she missed them all but I was glad of a long, lazy Sunday.

My feet were very stiff when I woke up, with the left one particularly painful when I got up at just after seven this morning. They seem to stiffen all the time they are not being used and then give me hell when I put weight on them. I managed a shortened walk for Bailey but the pain in the top of my left foot was really severe, making walking very difficult, when I had sat down for a while during and after breakfast.

Through the day I put on several doses of Ibuprofen gel, which helped a little, and by around 5pm I was capable of producing a curry-and-rice dinner, though still in quite a lot of pain. The Sharwood Butter Chicken sauce – one of three I had bought after a recommendation from Aidan and Donni – produced a reasonable result but I think I'll go back to Patak's for the next time.

At 11:25am, when I came back to the computer, the 'Great Petition' display updated itself and hit an amazing total of 5,441,245 signatures. People are obviously still signing. Last Thursday the total was 'only' 1,150,000! I am desperately keen to see Brexit cancelled, but rather anxious about the reactions of Brexit supporters in view of the disgusting threat which have been sent to MPs by people who, I am sure, are just searching for something to justify atrocities in their twisted little minds. I certainly won't be wearing a 'Remain' badge on the streets or displaying 'Remain' bills in my front windows!

My sight is becoming more and more of a problem, with the floaters blurring mainly fairly close-up vision. Typing this at around 10:15am after spending half an hour sorting out my prescription drugs for the next two weeks, I really am having a struggle focusing the monitor screen. I have to use the reading section of my glasses to see the screen from about two feet away. I hope I get a call to see Mr Dinakaran soon...

## **Tuesday 26 March 2019**

At four degrees this morning wasn't a very tempting one for a walk, and after getting downstairs with significant pain mostly in the top of the left foot I decided that it would be sensible to miss today's out as yesterday's seemed to have done quite a bit of damage.

I did manage a trip to the Co-op after breakfast, walking noticeably slowly but coping.

The Great Petition had reached a stupendous 5,677,830 signatures by the time I got the PC fired up, and the news on Radio four was suggesting that Parliament was going to take over Brexit from the Government. Amazing! Even more amazing was the fact that the numbers rolled almost every time I looked at the site, and by 12:30 the total had hit 5,715,526 signatures. BBC TV news had things developing fast. I'm sure I heard someone say that even Jacob Rees-Mogg was admitting that Brexit might not happen!

Claire arrived at about 3pm to talk about the equity release plan. We were both rather unclear about it all, so here clarification was very welcome. We signed what needed to be signed and I photocopied our passports and

driving licences in glorious technicolour. The simple facts are that fairly soon £30,000 will be credited to our joint bank account and a further £40,000 will be available to be drawn down in further payments as needed.

I have found a company which should be able to rebuild the conservatory with a proper tiled roof and Velux skylights, based in nearby Rotherham, and will be searching for a really good kitchen designer/contractor. I also intend to pay off the outstanding balance of the car and sofa loans, clearing repayments totalling about £310 per month.

### **Wednesday 27 March 2019**

I managed a very short walk with Bailey early this morning but couldn't handle much distance on my painful feet and left foot.

I had sorted out the satnav to get us to Doncaster Royal Infirmary yesterday evening and this morning I found a map of the hospital site on their website. I printed one which should enable us to get to the department Pat needed.

I haven't done as much driving as Pat recently, and I felt just slightly anxious about getting her to the hospital. I knew that we would need to drive due north, straight up the main road through our village and on to the next one, then to the little town where our favourite Italian restaurant is. The same road would take us straight to Doncaster – which might be where the trouble would start. James, the nice refined male voice of our second and larger Garmin satnav, did a great job and we got to Doncaster in. He took us on a very tortuous route through residential areas and eventually onto the hospital campus. We knew we needed to follow the roads that form a ring around the hospital and find Gate 1A. We have been there before and saw lots of familiar stuff and eventually found ourselves inside the gate and looking at a very full car park. To our intense relief someone pulled out of a space right in front of us within minutes and we nailed the spot at once.

We were about an hour early for Pat's appointment, but when we got to the right building we headed straight upstairs, stopping at the top to use – of all things – a vending machine provided by Lavazza, our regular coffee brand. We bought a chocolate bar each, with a hot chocolate for Pat and a *latte* for me installed ourselves on a comfortable seat. Things seemed rather chaotic at first, but she was called fairly promptly, leaving me to read (using the Kindle app on my phone) and finish my coffee and Snickers bar. She was back after around an hour, having had a chunk taken out of the side of her knee. This would go to pathology for analysis.

The drive home was a bit haphazard as I decided just to drive around until I saw a useful sign. This took us on a roundabout route which took us getting on for an hour to get us home.

I was pleased with my driving performance but quite weary by the time we got home. I was also pleased with how I had coped with the long walks around the huge hospital site, but my feet were quite sore at the end of the drive home.

Pat had detailed instructions to look after her leg, so I was busy sorting out a decent dinner and preventing her from doing too much.

## **Thursday 28 March 2019**

I managed only a very short walk this morning because the soles of my feet felt really bruised.

I did a modest shop in Sainsbury's, and the bed foot coped with that.

In spite of having to nurse her leg, Pat insisted on preparing a pasta dish for dinner with me assisting. It was delicious.

## **Friday 29 March 2019**

I had a decent night's sleep in spite of getting up to pee five times, though the time between daybreak and 7:15 found me brooding and worrying and generally getting into an anxiety state! Everything trivial seemed to loom up and take on a threatening fell. I had thought about staying in bed a little bit longer than usual but decided the horrors would go away if I got up, which they did.

It was a chilly but beautiful morning and for the first time since last week I managed a more-or-less complete walk in around 17 minutes. The left foot was uncomfortable but not really painful.

People are still signing the petition. As I type, the total is an amazing 5,964,446 which is only about 30-odd thousand short of six million! In spite of this the government has refused the petition's demands!

## **Saturday 30 March 2019**

Today's weather was beautiful and our outside thermometer – usually very accurate – showed 20 degrees by 2pm although my phone said 14 degrees for our area.

A fairly lazy day for both of us. We decide not to bother watching the French thriller which normally occupies BBC4's 9pm usual foreign crime slot on Saturdays and were reading in bed not long after 9.

## **Sunday 1 April 2019**

I was up to the loo five times through last night but got back to sleep easily each time. My shoulder was very painful (and is as I type now) and the left foot was uncomfortably stiff each time I got up. I snapped awake at 7:15 at the climax of a very vivid and realistic dream, and came down to a temperature of zero. The foot was difficult but eased as I moved around, so I decided to try a walk. I could only manage a short distance along the street, though and we only clocked just over 4¼ minutes. I put Ibuprofen gel on the shoulder before dressing but it was still painful when I had set the table for breakfast.

The new 21-inch monitor I ordered from Amazon yesterday to help with my declining vision arrived today and, after some doubts, by the time I put the PC to bed I had got control of the settings for it and was seeing much larger text and images on screen. As I am typing this I am really enjoying the clarity of what I write.

We went to Aidan's and Donni's for Sunday dinner, and they put on a really lovely spread.

## **Tuesday 2 April 2019**

I don't know what happened to Monday – maybe there just wasn't enough to report except that I only managed a very short and painful walk lasting only about four minutes.

I had a weird experience this morning. It seemed that my internal clock had not coped with the change to British Summer (or Standard?) time yesterday morning. I woke at 7:15 as usual but felt really reluctant to get up, so I granted myself 30 minutes grace.

I managed a proper walk, getting round in 15 minutes 7 seconds. The legs and feet were aching, but nothing I couldn't handle.

Today was the day when the surveyor was due to visit to confirm the value of our house and he turned up dead on time. He was very pleasant, but didn't give anything at all away. So now we just wait for the final confirmation of the so-called lifetime mortgage. This should take away all financial worries and allow us to do some major home improvements, including having a solid roof put on the conservatory with Velux roof lights and having the kitchen totally redesigned and modernised, which is overdue because the cooker we inherited with the house, and which impressed us so much when we first moved in, is now dying slowly. We will also be able to pay off the car and furniture loans as well as any balances remaining on the credit cards. I haven't adjusted totally to the Merc, so we may look for something slightly smaller – a BM 1-series, perhaps...

I had a second go at the Youngs battered cod fillets, grilling them this time instead of baking in the oven. The batter was nice and crisp and the fish moister, but we still weren't very impressed.

### **Wednesday 3 April 2019**

I managed the walk again this morning, in a slightly slower time of 16 minutes 23 seconds. On the way out I was relieved to find that our blue recycling wheelie-bin had been emptied after being rejected as 'contaminated' two weeks ago.

My right shoulder has been giving me a lot of pain recently, and I am wondering whether this is a repetitive-strain injury, because it gets worse when I am typing.

I did a fairly major shop at Sainsbury's this morning, stocking up on various ready meals including Chinese, Thai and Italian dishes – a sad move for such foodies as we have always been, but a realistic approach to dealing with our loss of appetite and interest in food. I found a box of Bird's Eye battered haddock fillets and decided to give these a try. We always get haddock when we have fish and chips in a restaurant or brought home from the local chippie, so we will see.

And we did. The alleged shredded duck with pancakes and Hoi Sin sauce was a total disaster and the Thai red curry wasn't much better. We still have the lasagne to try but we don't feel very optimistic.

Maybe I should do an order to Ocado for some Waitrose goodies. = - or get back to doing our own cooking!

### **Thursday 4 April 2019**

I allowed myself a 'lie-in' again today, getting up sometime after 7:35, and didn't get out for the walk until I had heard the 8 o'clock news. The feet felt better than they had at this time of day for ages, and we had a very pleasant walk on a chilly but bright spring morning. I was amazed at how comfortable the walk was and was able to put a little extra into my pace, getting round in 14 minutes 57 seconds compared with 16:23 yesterday and 15:07 on Tuesday.

My feet – particularly the habitually troublesome left foot – felt amazingly good as I walked around the house.

My eyes, on the other hand, were shockingly blurred and irritable. I put my prescription drops in just after 9am, which did help, but as I write this I really am struggling to read the 11-point Verdana font.

I have been wondering what to do about front door keys while Pat is away on her four-day girlie jaunt to BudaPest – of all places! - at the end of the month. I have one on my main keyring with the car key and one attached to my stopwatch lanyard for the morning walks and which I often stuff in my pocket when I pop to the shop, but if I was to lose that I would need to be able to find another. After a hunt along the hooks on the back of the utility-room door I found a ring with two working front-door keys. The fob was marked 'Mum and Paul front door' so I assume it was the one Aidan used when he was living here. All I have to do now is find a really clever place to hide one outside – or maybe I could tape one under the insole of the gel insole of one of my walking shoes, which I now wear all the time... I tried this with a piece of parcel tape and the gel seemed to have absorbed the key completely – I couldn't feel it at all!

I spent quite a lot of time watching BBC News this morning, as I often do, and was quite impressed with some of my own insights. Forgetting Brexit for a welcome short break, I watched an item on the Boeing 737 crashes and was appalled to learn that some IT-looney had fitted these planes with a fully automatic stall control system. Stalling is what many planes do, suddenly going into an upwards climb – the opposite of a dive. This has happened accidentally ever since planes were invented and requires the pilot to push his stick forward to put the aircraft back on a level course. The stall control system is apparently capable of pushing the plane's nose downwards *automatically* to cancel the stall. If it does this when the plane is flying on a level and not stalling, it seems it could push it into an uncontrolled dive. Simple question: would you design an autonomous system capable of taking the plane into a dive, even if it isn't stalling? And if you did, shouldn't the pilots be able to correct the dive? What with that, and trying to make sense of Brexit, my brain has been getting quite a bit of exercise. I am really impressed that Labour and the Tories seem to be starting to work together. The first meeting between Corbyn and May seems to have pulled an effective trigger.

Here is a serious question: why would anyone think that a referendum allowing the population to vote for or against something they cannot possibly understand is a democratic tool? The democratic bit is that we elect MPs to represent us and make these difficult decisions on our behalf.

I was looking at my Sainsbury's MasterCard statement for this month and was concerned to spot a £350 debit to Perry's Chesterfield. They were the Ford garage chain which looked after our Focus but with which we have

had no contact at all since we bought the Mercedes. I phoned Perry's immediately and it turned out that they own Advance, the body repair garage which repaired the Merc on insurance recently, and that the £350 was our insurance excess paid with the card on the doorstep to the driver who collected the Merc for repair. Why are businesses knitted together so tortuously?

We had a lazy afternoon watching the first three episodes of *The Bay* on our recorder because rain (leaks) had stopped play in the House of Commons. The Brexit Saga continues to worry, entertain and amuse me and gets more and more ridiculous every day.

### **Friday 5 April 2019**

I had completely forgotten about the key under my insole when I put the shoe on and wore it all morning – for our walk (the same distance in the same time as yesterday), checking the car's tyre pressures and giving it a rough wash, and mowing and edge-trimming the lawn. This will obviously be the solution to The Lost Key Problem once I have got some more gaffer tape.

I had to do yet another shop this afternoon for food to feed Alistair and the boys. I wanted a few things from Aldi, where I hadn't been for some time, and was appalled at the total redesign of what had been a familiar shop for years. I really hate it when a supermarket suddenly decides to move everything it sells.

### **Monday 8 April 2019**

Alistair and the boys were busy for most of their stay, occupied with Ewan's pretty demanding science homework, which required quite a bit of online research, and Tom's latest corrugated cardboard constructions. All we were needed to do was to feed them (Alistair ordered takeaway online for Friday night) and make encouraging noises. They were gone before 8am to get to their ju-jitsu club in Buxton, leaving Pat and me to enjoy our Sunday. Bird's Eye battered haddock fillets turned out to be much better than Youngs' cod versions, as expected, but the MxCain's 'Gastro Chips' (part-cooked before freezing) were a real disappointment.

I got up early this morning with Pat, who had her usual preparations to make for her weekly morning with Anton.

Bailey and I did our usual walk in 16¼ minutes in bright weather but with a brisk and chilly north-easterly wind.

I had been unable to send Anton the normal fax yesterday, getting the message 'Ringing but no answer' every time I tried, and when Pat got to Anton's this morning she phoned to say she couldn't make any sense of his fax machine. We tried various calls between our two phones and I tried sending the fax again, but nothing worked. We deduced that the council official who is supposed to manage his finances had let his phone be disconnected due to non-payment of his bill. Loss of fax contact isn't really catastrophic, but it is good to know that we are letting Anton know when Pat should arrive. Whether he can actually read our faxes these days, we have no way of knowing. He used to be very amused when I made mistakes in my messages, but that was a long time ago!



I received a letter from DVLA over the weekend about renewing the ridiculously small road-tax on the Merc - £20 a year, thanks to its absurdly low fuel consumption. I spent ages searching for the letter this morning and tracked it down eventually, and went online to set up a direct debit for - wait for it! - £1.75 per month!

I don't seem to have recorded my season's second attack on the lawn sometime last week, but I am suffering the ill-effects of manhandling the mighty Atco Admiral round the garden, with my usual shoulder problem much aggravated and some strange stiffness and pains around the thighs.

### **Tuesday 9 April 2019**

Another good walk in dull, chilly conditions, completed in 14 minutes 50 seconds.

### **Wednesday 10 April 2019**

The temperature was nippy zero degrees when I got downstairs at about 7:30 this morning, but Bailey and I managed to enjoy the usual short route (the one without the loop to the bin), covering it in just over 16½ minutes in the bright sunshine.

I managed to stay busy through the morning, demolishing the empty wine boxes in the garage and sliding them down the sides of the blue recycling wheelie-bin, bagging the bottles from the glass crates behind the kitchen and taking them to the skips at the Civic Centre, and then getting various other odd jobs done. I decided to try to bring the bald area at the side of the lawn where the tree surgeons had cut some shrubs back was loosening the dry soil with a rake, sprinkling it with Wilkinson's lawn repair seed and giving the area a good drenching with the hose. There were various other jobs, ranging in trivialness to a doggy-poo patrol.

A few days ago I decided to check the tyre pressures on the car and found them only needing a small adjustment, at which point I decided to hose and wipe the car over. The amazing paint used on the Merc looked really brilliant when I had finished.

The Alpecin 'Hybrid' Caffeine shampoo I ordered yesterday to tackle my itchy scalp arrived from Amazon in the mid-morning, and I gave the pond pump and fountain a good cleanout.

### **Thursday 11 April 2019**

I got up in time for the 7:30am news summary on Radio 4, but I took my time to give the primary-school kids time to get into school and off the street. When we got out we found two separate set of road works, including temporary traffic lights, within a couple of hundred metres of home. We got through these OK but I decided to try extending the walk to its old, longer route - a useful test for my left foot, which wasn't feeling too bad. To my delight, we got right round without difficulty, clocking 25 minutes two seconds. I hope I'll be able to keep this up.

Pat had an 11:30 appointment at our practice's main surgery, which is a car-drive away, to find out why the stitches from her biopsy haven't dissolved. I drove her over and she came out without any real satisfaction: she will just have to wait until the healing process is complete.

We decided to drive over to Whitby's, the temple of fish and chips on our side of Sheffield, and treat ourselves to a large lunch of prawn cocktails, hadock with chips and peas, and a dessert of treacle sponge and custard. By the time we got home we were good for pretty well nothin g except a cup of tea and a doze in fron the the BBC News channel.

### **Friday 12 April 2019**

I went out to the neighbouring village hoping to get a haircut without loo long a wait, and found only two other guys in the shop. The one in the chair was almost done and the other's hair was pretty sparse, but he turned out to be very fussy and his haircut took well over half an hour – quite a bit longer than my hair and beard took together.

I had been to the loo before we came out but the wait in the barber's shop gave my bladder time to fill up, and I thought the subsequent short stop at the Co-op would take a bit too long. So I backed up to a wall as far from the shop as possible and opened the tailgate, doing a conspicuous bit of fiddling with various items in the boot before getting the 'male urinal bottle' (as the pharmacy call it) out of the box of travel oddments. With the tailgate up I stood the bottle on the lip of the boot and managed to pee into its spout without drawing attention to myself!

Unfortunately the pull-out boot cover, which has very flimsy little fittings at its ends to hold it closed, had lost a screw and escaped from its locking notch. With a bit of hunting around in the boot I found the fitting and one of its absolutely minute bolts. The fitting has been loose for a while so I had no hope of finding the missing bolt. I found that if I latched one end the rest of the cover would lie on the shopping, but when I got home and opened the boot the cover decided to roll itself up rather violently. When I had got the shopping out of the way I managed to find the missing fitting and its almost-invisible bolt.

Later, when i had time, I searched through the stacks of 2oz tobacco tins, inherited from my obsessive Dad for one labelled 'small bolts'. I found two and managed to locate a bolt that would do the job, together with another similar one which anchored the fitting really well, so the boot cover now works better than it has since buying the car.

### **Monday 15 April 2019**

The weekend was more-or-less uneventful and I was quite happy to start the new week this morning, which was bright, breezy and pretty cold at around four degrees at walk time. My feet and ankles were fairly comfortable once they had loosened up and we did the medium-length version of the regular walk in 16¼ minutes. Pat got off to Anton's in good time, and I tackled the baffling heap of paper relating to the lifetime mortgage (equity release) which is moving slowly and getting a bit baffling. I emailed Claire, the financial advisor, with some queries but hadn't heard back by teatime. She was probably on her travels all day and not accessing email on her mobile...? I managed to watch the first two episodes of *The Last Kingdom*, based on the Bernard Cornwell novels which I am currently re-reading, which I have on the hard drive of our satellite TV box. I spent a bit of time later trying to find out whether the 8<sup>th</sup> season of *Game of Thrones* would be available soon on Amazon Prime Video, with no success yet. All the previous seasons are there, so I think it

will come along eventually. If not, I'll have to buy it on DVD and hope our old players will work!

I seem to be very tired most of the time these days. I am taking the diuretic prescribed by the urology consultant every day, which had me peeing a lot through the afternoons but still up several times a night. I'm keeping a log of my nocturnal trips to the loo and will be seeing him again on the 3 May. Before that I have to go to the blood-test clinic for a PSA (prostate-specific antigen) test. Which will tell him whether or not if any cancer is progressing.

My main worry is my vision, which is becoming much worse due to the floaters in my 'good' right eye. I have taken to reading mostly using the Kindle app on my phone, as my old Kindle is getting pretty knackered. Then there's the pain in my right shoulder – the joint between the clavicle and the scapula, which may be repetitive strain injury from too much mouse activity on the computer. Great fun, this old age thing!

I had a very taxing morning, first bringing the small hardwood table and its two chairs up from the summer-house veranda and then repeating the task for the big circular teak one and its five surviving chairs up. The latter is taxing because the table is very heavy and the only technique that works is to roll it up the garden on its edge. Once the furniture was in place I got the Karcher pressure washer out of the garage and fired it up. It took more than a couple of hours to blast all the grot of winter off the tables and chairs and the paving on which they will stand. Once this lot was successfully completed I took the horrible old cover off the gas barbecue and took the three cast-iron grill stands off and jet-washed them, together with the two oblong stainless steel trays which hold the utensils like tongs and slices. Then I took our bag trolley down to the shed, brought the butane bottle up and connected it to the regulator on the barbie. All three burners fired up at first try and I put the lid down and left the machine to bake itself for half an hour. It behaved perfectly, so if the weather is good over Easter we'll be able to have a good old-fashioned barbecue with the family.

### **Wednesday 17 April 2019**

The most urgent task today was to visit Aldi and Sainsbury's for ingredients we will need for the weekend's catering. I got off as soon as possible after breakfast without a shopping list that filled one entire page of a shorthand notebook. The Aldi visit was brief but the Sainsbury's one was a bit of an epic, but I managed to get everything on the list. The real challenge was getting the outrageously heavy trolley downhill to the car without losing control of it!

Pat was up to her eyes in cooking when I got back, and once we had unloaded about seven bags I got changed and went out to mow the lawn. This was only its second cut, and it looked dense and bright green after the mighty Atco had done its stuff. We really do need some April showers, which have been quite absent so far since the turn of the month.

I decided to get the hose connected and gave all the container plants a good soaking before dinner.

### **Friday 17 April 2019**

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Yesterday was pretty busy, with Pat cooking most of the day and me acting as an assistant. I went out for a 2-litre bottle of whole milk and used almost all of it making Béchamel sauce for her lasagnes, which gave my right shoulder a nasty dose of repetitive stress. I have had a lot of pain in the shoulder for some time and I'm worried that even my exercises aren't soothing it. Nor, come to that, are my Voltarol and Ibuprofen gels.

I got up at 7:10am this morning after an hour or two of restlessness. The sky was hazy but it was pleasantly mild at around 10 degrees. Bailey and I completed the full round of five walks in one hour fifteen minutes – not impressive, but a relief that I managed to get out on all five weekdays. The left foot has been uncomfortable but not too much so.

We have Alistair and the boys arriving late this afternoon and probably his new family tomorrow. Then on Sunday Aidan and Donni will be here for a meal, but I don't know whether Alistair and the lads will still be here to see them.

I have done various minor jobs this morning, including a thorough dooie-poo patrol, and will be vacuuming downstairs next.

I have sorted my schedule out for the next few days. I need to find some appropriate flowers and something chocolaty for Pat's Easter present so I will go to Sainsbury's (now that M&S has closed) and pick up a few other odds and ends fairly early tomorrow morning.

### **Monday 22 April 2019**

We had a busy but enjoyable weekend with Alistair and the boys, joined by Alistair's new family. We barbecued in the heat and everyone enjoyed themselves. On Sunday Aidan, Barney and Donni came and we barbecued some more in the amazing heat. Aidan volunteered to cook with the thermometers clocking a shade temperature around 28 degrees! Good fun again.

Today Pat did her usual Monday duty at Anton's so I had the place to myself. I watched two episodes of *The Last Kingdom* – the TV series based on Bernard Cornwell's Saxons series of novels, and in the afternoon, once she was home, we lazed in even more heat. I did manage to clean the barbecue, though.

### **Tuesday 23 April 2019**

I was up early this morning to get my blood test for the urology consultant. I managed a routine walk with Bailey and had a glass of milk and a biscuit before going out. I got to the hospital at about 9am and was the only patient in the clinic. I was bled quickly and painlessly and was back home by 9:30.

Today is looking a lot cooler than the last two scorches.

Pat's strange pains in her eye and the side of her head were becoming more troublesome, so she tried the *AskMyGP* function on our practice website and got an appointment to see one of the senior partners. He was quite concerned and said she should book an urgent eye examination with the opticians who prescribed her glasses, SpecSavers. She got on the phone and managed to get one for 8:50am tomorrow. She also needed a

battery of blood tests which we managed to get done at our local hospital early in the afternoon.

I had a call from the surgery today too, checking on where I stood after cancelling my ankle reviews. The upshot was that they booked me an orthopaedic consult. While on the phone I mentioned that I hadn't booked my annual NHS Health Check, so they booked this as well for next Tuesday at 2pm.

My eyes were particularly gummy and bleary after rising early, so I had to work hard driving what is usually a very familiar and easy route to the hospital. They were still a bit gooey by the time I had changed our bedding and had a shower, and we had had coffee. I decided that it might be time to throw my current bottle of prescription drops and open a new one, and the fresh ones definitely seemed to help. Have I been living with ineffective drops for months?

### **Wednesday 24 April 2019**

I drove Pat to SpecSavers because she didn't know whether she would need dilating drops for the examination. I grabbed the opportunity to visit my favourite fishmonger on the Wednesday market, Darren Jelley, had an enjoyable chat and bought fresh salmon-tail fillets, natural smoked haddock, raw king prawns and a dressed crab home. A starter of buttered prawns and crab for lunch today and fried salmon and chips for dinner tonight...

The practitioner had taken a lot of time and effort, and came up with a rather worrying diagnosis of an inflamed temporal nerve, which was sent straight back to the GP. She needs to get the all-clear before she flies off to Budapest next Monday, so fingers crossed...

### **Saturday 27 April 2019**

The last couple of days have been rather chaotic, with nothing much to report here. Pat and her pals are going off to Budapest tomorrow for 3-4 days and there was talk of me driving her and friend Sue across to Kiverton Park for 6am, but luckily Sue's husband John had already volunteered. Sue was here for quite a while, and we had a pleasant chat together.

Pat went upstairs to pack after dinner and we had a scare with the spring balance she had bought to weigh her bag. We tried the bathroom scales, with me standing on the platform and picking up the case. The sum worked out fine. We put a fresh battery in the spring balance and all seemed well. Bloody RyanAir!

It will be a relief when they finally get off!

### **Sunday 28 April 2019**

We had a good morning watching the inspiring London Marathon – so many superb athletes and so many very ordinary people doing something extraordinary for their favourite charities.

Pat seemed to have got her packing sorted in time for the various race finishes. Disappointing Mo Farrar but great to see so many achievements.

I watched a couple of music documentaries I had recorded at various times while Pat was putting what I hoped would be the finishing touches

to her travel preparations (weighing her case was the worst bit because the spring balance she has bought didn't seem to be working very well, so I ended up picking up the case and stepping on and off the bathroom scales!): one about the great bluesman John Lee Hooker and another very revealing one about Fleetwood Mac, one of my very favourite bands. Pat watched half of this but I may watch it again while she is away.

My shoulder was playing horrible games by the time we had finished dinner. It hasn't been bad for most of the day but it didn't seem to approve of my using the arm to steer a fork.

The evening will end early for Pat's pick-up, probably soon after watching the highlights of the Azerbaijan GP.

## **Tuesday 30 April 2019**

We managed to get to bed quite early on Sunday and coped fairly well when my phone's alarm went off gently at around 4am. Sue and John arrived at about 5am and Pat was fully prepared by then. My day was very lazy, working my way through the remaining episodes of *The Last Kingdom* by bedtime.

I saw Dr Kumar at 7pm – a very pleasant encounter with the first GP I saw when we originally registered at the practice in 2006, dealing with my feet and ankles – for which he gave me a x-ray request which I can deal with on Friday before or after my 14:00 urology appointment. Unfortunately I forgot to mention the bloody shoulder, which has been getting worse and worse for about the past week. I did *tagliatelle alla bolognese* for dinner.

I woke early this morning but deliberately delayed getting up so I could miss the primary-school run. There were a few kinds and parents around when we went out so I could do to leave even later.

After my second cup of tea and updating this entry I wasn't sure whether I wanted to bother with breakfast, but in the end I had a bowl of corn flakes with cold milk and white sugar, a change from my usual muesli, prunes and yogurt.

I think it was today when I remembered to water all the indoor pot plants and hose the ones outside.

I spent most of the rest of the day watching the two seasons of *The Last Kingdom* – the excellent TV adaptation of Bernard Cornwell's *Saxons Series* which I recorded two or three years ago. When I had finished all episodes I decided to see if the next series was on Amazon Prime, and it was, so I was still watching at well past midnight. I am reading the books in sequence at present and coming rather dangerously close to finishing the series.

## **Wednesday 1 May 2019**

I had another leisurely rising from my lonely bed this morning followed by a return to my 'proper' breakfast and took the dog walking shortly after the end of the 8 o'clock news. Later I did some dredging to find out if there were any more 'Saxons' books or episodes of the TV series, and was very disappointed. After sorting out my plans for the rest of the week I spent the rest of the morning reading the current book, *The Empty Throne*. There are three more to get through and the world is still waiting

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for the twelfth. It may be some time before Uhtred finally gets back control of his family's Northumbrian fortress, Bebanburg (Bamburgh) Castle and his success is committed to television.

Back to the typewriter, Bernard...

The plan for the rest of the week will go something like this:

- Thursday 2 May 10:00 Sainsbury's for Pat's birthday card, cake, flowers
- Friday 3 May 14:00 Urology appointment and ankle x-rays
- Friday 3 May later but times unknown Pat home and Alistair arriving with the boys
- Friday 3 May morning Change our beds and vacuum around upstairs and down followed by mopping the kitchen floor and general tidying.

I had a bit of a memory lapse when typing this list: I managed the card and cake but couldn't for the life of me remember the third item – the flowers. A bit of brain-racking (wracking?) got the flowers after about five minutes. Maybe I should be going to the memory clinic as well...?

### **Thursday 2 May 2019**

I decided to stick to my lazy morning plan and during the hour or so between waking properly and getting up I couldn't for the life of me remember the three items I need to get – card, cake and flowers – and had to open this document once I was downstairs to check the list above. I had lost the memories again after the walk. I don't know if it is being alone or what, but I am getting quite concerned about these memory lapses.

I put together what was probably the shortest shopping list I have ever taken out. I was concerned to secure my keys because Pat isn't here as she usually is when I shop. If I ever lose them I can always call her and she can get a taxi to bring her keys – but not from Budapest! I decided to wear my old fleece jacket, which has zip-fastening side pockets, and to be very careful to zip the keys in the right side as soon as I locked the car.

I finished and got home at 10:30am equipped with two big fresh pizzas and a huge bag of frozen French fries to feed to Alistair and the boys when they arrive tomorrow evening.

Our friend John (husband of best friend Sue) called in sometime after I got back and we sank a couple of espressos together while discussing families at some length. The good news was that he will be picking Pat and Sue up from Steph's. I had spent half an hour yesterday afternoon setting up the satnav with her address in case the job fell to me.

My vague suspicion that my shoulder pain might involve an element of repetitive stress was confirmed when I finished typing the first paragraph of today's diary entry, with severe pain seemingly caused by typing and using the mouse. This is coming back now so I am going to stop here.

A little later I realised that I had no recollection of eating breakfast this morning. Investigating the contents of the washing-up bowl and my pill

box didn't shed any light, which was rather worrying. Had I driven to Sainsbury's on an empty stomach – or what?

### **Monday 6 May 2019**

Pat was returned to me safely by John Iatish of Friday evening after a chaotic journey back with the RyanAir flight very late arriving at East Midlands. The jokes about 'the Irish airline' are obviously all justified.

This morning, we got back into our regular Monday routine even though today is a Bank Holiday. Our walk was done in 14 minutes 26 seconds and everything was ready for Pat when she came down.

She was very worried about Alistair and Anton over the weekend. Alistair had seemed quite ill but managed his usual time with the boys here and then to hook up with Heather yesterday to go to a 'vaping expo' (not a joke!) in Birmingham.

Pat went off to Anton's as usual this morning after her solo visit had been hijacked by the woman who runs his care service in a follow-up to her call yesterday to tell Pat about problems they had been having with him, which was all that was needed. She is going to need a few days taking things easy...

My theory about the shoulder problems being RSI are confirmed even as I type this: it felt fairly normal while I was watching the finale of *Line of Duty* and now feels very painful. I need to stop. I'm glad I managed to get Voltarol Gel added to my list of repeat prescriptions...

Both feeling pretty weary and Pat stressed about Alistair and Anton, we goggled at the new royal birth and accidentally fell into a drama series about Catherine of Aragon on Amazon Prime which was irritating because all the Spanish characters spoke English with a thick foreign accent – a dramatic convention I have never liked.

### **Tuesday 7 May 2019**

Things didn't get any better this morning. Alistair's pain had been so bad in the small hours that Heather had called an ambulance. This news left Pat really anxious while I ploughed on with tedious routine stuff like nearly £100-worth of shopping at Sainsbury's.

Later on Alistair came back with the news that the stones were thought to be gallstones, and when I looked these up it looked as if removal of the gall-bladder would be relatively simple and with very few problems. This made Pat feel somewhat better. As I write he is still in hospital and waiting for the results of a scan he had earlier.

We didn't get any more news before bedtime.

### **Wednesday 8 May 2019**

This morning was quite wet. Bailey and I set out in light rain but this got heavier within minutes so we did a swift about-turn, scoring a shameful seven minutes. Pat managed to get to see the GP early on and I emailed the solicitor who got back quite quickly giving us options for a meeting. I booked one week today. Shortly after that I got a call from Doncaster Royal Infirmary asking to arrange an urgent appointment for a prostate MRI requested by the urology consultant. This was a bit unnerving as I hadn't heard any suggestion that anything to do with me prostate was



urgent. I managed to put them off until the week after next because I hadn't had anything from the solicitor at this point, so I ended booking two weeks today. I asked if the MRI could be done at Bassetlaw, our local branch of the same trust where I had a head scan some time ago but was told that they didn't do prostates. I hate battling through Doncaster even though James, the voice of our satnav, is very good at getting me to the hospital. Grin and bear it, I suppose.

I had a bit of a struggle doing my magic copy and replace routine of cloning the last full month on my bank account spreadsheet and changing the month to give me a full list of my transactions. I managed it in the end and the projection wasn't looking bad.

### **Thursday 9 May 2019**

Bailey and I managed a decent walk this morning. My legs and feet were quite painful when we set off but they loosened up as we went.

Pat needed a birthday card posting this morning so I decided to kill two birds with one stone and visit the postbox on the way to the local hospital with Dr Kumar's x-ray referral for my feet and ankles. This turned out to be a remarkably quick hospital visit and I was home in time for coffee – a far cry from the long waits at Derby for my annual review, and the incredible delays for x-rays there. It's a pity I didn't mention the shoulder pain when I saw him about the ankles because this has become by far the bigger problem. I'll ask to have the shoulder looked at when I hear what he has to say about the x-rays of the feet and ankles.

Pat spent all day ironing and hoping to get some news of Alistair. He appears to have had a scan early but hasn't been answering messages since.

I fitted a shower in during the afternoon, before I started preparation and cooking of two lovely thick lamb chops, Jersey Royal potatoes and two packets of English asparagus. I put the whole large bag of Jerseys with water on a low heat and quite soon after it started simmering I was amazed to discover that they were done. I drained and covered them, ready to plate as many as each of us wanted for fast microwave reheating. The asparagus was a bit stringy but very tasty cooked on the microwave's 'VEG' program, served swimming in molten Lurpak, and the chops were delicious – our first red meat for quite a while.

I had a strange episode later. I woke suddenly from a fairly deep sleep and saw from my watch that it was 8:30. For some reason I believed that this was 8:30am, and said to Pat that I had overslept by an hour from my usual getting-up time. It took a minute or so to register that it was morning and I had been watching *Great British Menu*. Just normal confusion or something more sinister...? I have been dozing off quite a lot in front of the TV, and tonight I had drunk a little more wine than I do usually.

### **Friday 10 May 2019**

I got up to pee at around 5am this morning and believed that I had got up at least three times after that. I had a real struggle to wake myself up and felt rather dozy for the rest of the morning.

Pat was eager to visit Alistair in Wakefield's Pinderfields hospital. To be honest I didn't fancy the drive up and back, which would be similar to our trips to visit Barney in Huddersfield. However, mother's instincts have to be respected.

It was a dreary grey morning, but dry, and we managed the usual route for our walk, finishing in just over 16 minutes. Later on the rain set in quite seriously.

Pat managed to get a couple of texts out of Alistair but that was all by 10am. Finally, she got to talk to him at around midday and he told her that they were keeping him in but he hoped to go home tomorrow. She suggested it would be more sensible for us to wait and visit him in Dewsbury tomorrow.

Having located Pinderfields Hospital on the satnav from a previous visit I managed to program the Dewsbury address in. The Garmin is clever: tell it the postcode and house number and it fills in the rest of the address by itself.

Typing this is causing a lot of pain in the shoulder, reinforcing my theory about repetitive stress. It is better if I keep the wrist on the edge of the desk. The mouse isn't so bad because the wrist is supported at all times.

### **Saturday 11 May 2019**

Staring with a 5am pee I was more-or-less awake until Pat brought me a cup of tea sometimes after 8, and I felt very tired indeed when I got up.

The news from Alistair was very skimpy all morning but finally, well after midday, the hospital decided to release him Pat wanted to go straight up to see him but he thought it would be better to wait until tomorrow as he might be called back if any of his test results required it.

So we had a lazy day waiting for the time to pass very slowly.

### **Sunday 12 May 2019**

It was a beautiful morning so we decided to go and see Alistair as soon as possible. I had a bit of a wrestle with the Garming satnav, programming his address in but ending up after a few minutes on the road heading for Steph's. We turned round and in a few minutes I had the entry corrected and we were on our way up to M1 junction 31. The motorway was quite quiet and we got to Dewsbury in around an hour. Alistair was looking reasonably wide-awake and chaeerful, and we had a couple of hours playing with their tiny dog before deciding that he had had enough and heading back. Pat felt a lot better after seeing him, but she is still very worried about his health. The prognosis is not looking too good.

I watched the beginning of the Spanish Grand Prix highlights and decided to save the rest for tomorrow morning.

### **Monday 13 May 2019**

I was amazed to find Pat getting up when I rolled over at 7:15. I had forgotten that the Monday Anton trip was going to be more complicated than usual, with a Community Nurse arriving between 10 and 10:30am to take some blood samples. Pat needed to be there to let her in, but first she wanted to get him some new socks and underwear so that his carers can (they hope) get him into cleaner dressing habits (good luck with

that!). I hadn't sent him the usual fax last night so I sent an edited version pretending to have been sent last night. This arrived safely and Pat had more-or-less got through the usual Monday routine by the time Bailey and I got back from our pleasant sunny walk, and was ready to do the usual shopping and the extra bits.

Once she was gone I watched the rest of the Grand Prix even though I knew the result. This was very satisfactory from a Mercedes owner's point-of-view but the race itself was not very exciting.

I had a treasure hunt because my favourite mug, which I had used for two cups of tea, had totally vanished. I finally found it at around 10:45am, full of cold tea and sitting in the microwave!

I needed to order a print-at-home Amazon gift card for my step-granddaughter Josie's birthday, but that got tangled up too.

It was a beautiful hot sunny day and I decided after lunch to see if my stupid right shoulder would cope with the monster motor mower. Amazingly it did, and actually felt better after I had cut the whole of our large lawn.

### **Tuesday 14 May 2019**

My shoulder was no worse when I woke up this morning – maybe even a little easier. After a lovely walk in the mild sunshine I managed to wrestle clean fitted sheets onto our heavy Tempur mattresses and get the beds ready for us tonight. I had a shower straight afterwards, with hot water easing the shoulder. However, typing this now is a bit nasty.

### **Wednesday 22 May 2019**

I have found very little to write about lately. The shoulder is still giving me quite a lot of pain and awkwardness though I think it has improved quite a lot.

Today at 14:50 I have my prostate MRI scan in Doncaster (the local hospital doesn't have the equipment, unfortunately). This may or may not show that I need a needle biopsy *per rectum* and that will show whether or not I have prostate cancer, so quite a worrying time.

When my consultant, Mr Darrad, gets the scan results I assume he will book me an appointment – at Bassetlaw rather than Doncaster, I hope.

I had what seemed like a long night of visits to the loo but with plenty of sleep in between and no long drawn-out worrying sessions. However, when I checked the time on the way to the loo at around 7 o'clock I felt really groggy – much more so than usual. I decided to get back into bed for half an hour, and towards the end of that time I rolled over from my back to my front and got a sharp but not very severe pain running in the line across my abdomen just below the ribs. This unfamiliar pain disappeared as soon as I got up, as did much of the grogginess. By the time I had greeted Bailey and drunk a mug of tea with the 7:30 news summary I felt fairly normal and ready for a walk, though this was cut short when it started raining.

I haven't been recording my nocturnal loo visits since my last appointment, because the doctor seemed unimpressed with the spreadsheet printout. I was fairly unimpressed with him, because he

doesn't seem to want to inform me about my problems and isn't easy to understand. He has given me some log sheets for-24 hour records of drinking and peeing, but I won't bother with recording six days on those until I have my next appointment.

I'm not unduly worried about the prospect of prostate cancer because our friend John has had it for some years, since he was much younger than I am now, and it has been well controlled. His worst health problem seems to be irritable bowel syndrome, whereas mine is constipation.

### **Friday 24 May 2019**

We are coming towards the end of a pretty frenetic week. There seems to have been something going on almost every day, though this is a bit of an exaggeration.

I was rather anxious about my scan on Wednesday in Doncaster, for no particular reason. James, the posh voice of our new Garmin satnav guided us unerringly through the residential suburbs of Doncaster to one entrance to the vast campus of Doncaster Royal Infirmary and we found the hospital's own ring road easily, following it round anticlockwise until, as instructed, we found Gate 1A. On our last visit one car had pulled out of the hugely crowded car park just inside the gate, allowing us to slot straight in. This time, there was already a vacant space in almost exactly the same position and I was able to slot straight in. Once in the building we saw a sign for the MRI Centre almost immediately and, after a long walk, got into the centre's reception and me logged in.

I was surprised to find that the specialist prostate scanner was housed in a big van with a private contractor's details on it. This annoyed me because, as a lifelong socialist, I really believe in our NHS. The van was staffed by a young man and an obviously senior lady who were very pleasant and reassuring. I had assumed that just scanning my naughty bits would have been less of an ordeal than the brain scan I had a while ago, but I was just as fully closed up inside the monster machine and if anything the noise was even louder and more bizarre. I coped with about forty minutes of this, but was distinctly off-balance walking back to reception. I was ok to drive home, though, with James coaxing me through the Doncaster rush hour onto the familiar country roads.

Yesterday's busy bit was a 10am appointment with Emma, our lovely new (and very pregnant) solicitor. We got through the final paperwork for the equity release (lifelong mortgage) package, with all the remaining questions more-or-less answered, in about an hour. On the way out we managed to get to the polling station and for me to vote LibDem for the first time in my long political life. Forecasts suggest that the spiv Farage's 'Brexit Party' will have got the most votes when the results appear on Sunday...

Today's 'appointment' is a 4pm meal at Pizza Express in Buxton to celebrate Ewan's birthday. We will need to leave at about 2pm to find suitable parking and locate the restaurant. I had a great success yesterday afternoon, scanning the Buxton page of my Ordnance Survey Street Atlas of Derbyshire on my faithful HP all-in-one, then cropping the area of Buxton I wanted, enlarging it considerably to fill an A4 page

and printing it to produce a crystal-clear map, complete with P symbols for car-parks.

The Westminster cabaret continues, with May resigning as party leader in mid-morning but remaining as PM until a new leader takes over. Brexit still remains a mystery.

We left home at about 2pm and followed what used to be our regular route to Buxton when Alistair's family was still operational, bypassing Chesterfield and across to Baslow. We made it in about 90 minutes and the home-made map worked perfectly to find us a parking space near the restaurant. The meal together was really enjoyable, though my Caesar Salad was pretty dire – very fibrous with lots of mashed-up tinned tuna.

Another 90 minutes in the Merc got us home quite early for a relaxing evening.

### **Monday 17 June 2019**

There hasn't been much diary activity lately. We seem to have spent an awful lot of time charging to and from hospitals – mainly Doncaster Royal Infirmary and its small neighbour Montagu Hospital in Mexborough. This activity reached a climax last Friday. We had to get to Mexborough by 7:30am so I could be admitted for a transperineal prostate biopsy procedure.

We had tried a reconnoitre run following the satnav blindly and had been totally thwarted by closed roads, so I had gone back home and worked out a different route with the satnav only activated when we were fairly close. This worked fine and we managed to do a quick drive-by at the hospital on Thursday afternoon, so getting them on time on Friday morning was no problem.

I had a very disagreeable visit to the Montagu's department of dentistry a few years ago, but the day surgery unit was totally different. The consultant, Mr John Leveckis, and the south-Asian male anaesthetist were both very gentle and supportive, and the ladies of the nursing team were lovely. I emerged from the experience feeling fine, with no pain at all, despite having several needles pushed into my enlarged prostate to take samples in search of possibly sinister areas.

I felt fine when I got home, slept really well on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights in spite of the compression stockings I have to wear for six weeks to protect me against the blood clots of Deep Vein Thrombosis. I'm writing this now between midday and 1pm and feel fine in every way, though I have been pretty tired since Friday's very early morning.

The possible outcomes are (1) no sign of cancer in which case I will only need medication to help keep my peeing under control and (2) cancer which may or may not need treatment. Our good friend John has had prostate cancer for well over ten years and the strategy is just to keep it under close observation. It is, after all, the most easily treated of cancers.

### **Wednesday 19 June 2019**

I have been sleeping heavily since the biopsy, but in spite of taking the diuretics I have been up to the loo several times each night. My urine flow has been rather light and a little stingy, which may be the aftermath of having my urinary tract meddled with last Friday. I don't know whether I

was catheterised while I was under the anaesthetic. If so that would have made my urethra a little tender. The tiny half-tablets don't seem to have taken me to the loo too many times during the afternoons, which would explain the nocturnal pees.

My eyes were worryingly blurry all day yesterday, which was worrying, but the drops seem to have cleared them a bit this morning. It was a dull, wet morning when I got up but Bailey and I managed to find a narrow rain-free band for a 16-minute walk.

We tookg Bailey to be bathed and have his claws trimmed this afternoon. He came back very fragrant indeed!

## **Tuesday 25 June 2019**

I have been feeling much better over the past few days. It was too wet for a walk this morning – whatever happened to 'Flaming June'? We managed a decent time of 13 minutes yesterday, though.

I have been trying to unravel my various hospital appointments, particularly as I got a text saying Bassetlaw Urology had me booked in tomorrow. I phoned the appointment line at the end of last week and they changed this to a week today but didn't send me a text or a confirming letter. I had to ring again today to confirm this. I will be seeing my usual consultant, Mr Darrad, instead of Mr Leveckis, the surgeon who did the biopsy last week. I hope my results will have reached Mr Darrad when I see him.

I did a bit more phoning and in no time my appointment was moved from Bassetlaw to Doncaster and from Mr Darrad to (hooray!) Mr Leveckis. And it was re-timed for 11:30 tomorrow. I was told that the results from the biopsy should have been considered by a team meeting before this. I also got a letter with another appointment on Thursday 4 July at 15:20 at Doncaster for imaging on my painful shoulder. Just to pile up the commitments, we have to take Bailey to meet his new vets this Thursday, the 27 June, and finally I have to ring Mercedes in Chesterfield to book a service – hopefully a collection and return job.

Life has also been pretty chaotic over the past few days because Pat's deaf and almost totally blind brother Anton was ambulated to hospital. The ambulance was called by Rachael, the boss of his care team, because he wasn't eating or drinking – or doing anything very much. We managed to visit him in the medical assessment ward at the Northern General Hospital in Sheffield at the weekend, but he didn't recognise either of us. This was a worrying experience, but he is in good hands now and was scheduled to be seen by a psychiatric specialist today. How he will unravel this very unusual patient remains to be seen... Pat was really distressed by our visit, but it is good that Anton is in competent hands.

## **Friday 12 July 2019**

The lack of new entries to the diary since the 25 June reflects the ongoing chaos with our medical appointments and the continuing Anton saga. He was transferred from the general hospital a week or two ago and is in a special unit led by a consultant psychiatrist. He is not acknowledging anyone and is eating and drinking very little. Pat is more optimistic about

him but still very worried. She insists on visiting him even though he does not see or hear anything from visitors.

Our own medical stuff has been ridiculously complicated and we seem to have spent almost all our time in hospitals. I got a call this morning to meet with the oncology team in Sheffield next week, just when I was hoping for a break. Even the dog is getting a routine visit to the new vet this afternoon!

### **Wednesday 17 July 2019**

Yesterday was quite crazy. I had a 2pm appointment with a consultant called Mr Noon at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield. This is a hospital we both know well and can find without the satnav, after taking poor Anton to the eye clinic several times over the years. One of its major assets is an on-site multi-storey car park with a basement which most people seem to avoid.

Having got my aching head round this appointment I received a call from Doncaster Royal Infirmary asking me to come at 10am yesterday morning at the request of a Dr Pezaro, of whom I had never heard. The nurse who called suggested that if necessary Dr P could cancel my Sheffield afternoon appointment, and having read the document she has published on the Web I could well believe that: she (her given name is Carmel) is a very eminent lady indeed. I was looking forward to meeting her, but when we got to the hospital we saw one of her registrars. It turned out that the Doncaster prostate team do therapies like hormone, chemo and radio and Sheffield does the surgery. I had already been leaning towards surgery rather than chemicals, and after an interview with a registrar in Sheffield I was sure that this would be my choice. The leaflets I had collected described 'robot-assisted radical prostatectomy radical prostratectomy' as requiring just four 1cm-long cuts.

So at 11:40 this morning I phoned the Uro-Oncology Nurse Specialist Team number, more to register my preference than to get advice, and got a multi-choice answering service. I hadn't received a reply by 12:40, so I decided to try again after 2pm when someone might be back from lunch.

Later I got a reply and the nurse was happy to hear that I had made up my mind: surgery, not radio or chemo therapy. The whole process: robot-assisted radical prostatectomy. My cancer is limited to two pieces, one of each side of the gland. This treatment will get the whole lot out in one chunk.

### **Monday 22 July 2019**

I have been trying hard to get some feel for how long I will wait for my surgery and finally had another really helpful conversation with Sarah, one of the Uro-Oncology Nurse Specialist Team. The bad news is that Mr Levickis, the surgeon who did my biopsy, doesn't do prostate surgery, so I will have to settle for Mr Noon. I am sure he will be fine but Mr Leveckis and I really developed a good rapport. We will see when the call comes...

### **Monday 29 July 2019**

The confusion continues, but a letter sent by Mr Noon at Sheffield Hallamshire Hospital made very clear what the treatment options are and

what some of the dangers are. The final paragraph of the letter was particularly clear and comforting:

*We had a long discussion about how to proceed and given the fact that he has organ confined prostate cancer and he is seventy six. I think surgical or radiotherapy options and indeed watchful waiting would all be reasonable strategies.*

I had been quite optimistic about the robot controlled surgery, but came round to favouring the watchful waiting option, which is what our friend John has had for around ten years. Pat is fairly sure that I communicated this to the specialist nurses when I phoned them last week, and I am now hoping to get an appointment to see Mr Leveckis soon.

## **Tuesday 30 July 2019**

Meanwhile, as I write this we are about to set out for the North Manchester General Hospital to visit Anton, who has been moved again. We both know that Anton is very unlikely to know we have visited, but Pat doesn't want to feel that she hasn't made the effort. The satnav is primed and waiting, and she has just had a call about him from a social worker.

Pat got a call from a Dr Mann at the hospital which went on for a very long time. At around midday I got a letter from Doncaster Royal Infirmary with an appointment at the Urology clinic on the 21 August. I really hope I will be seeing my favourite consultant!

The rest of the day was exhausting. Guided by James, the refined voice of our brilliant Garmin sathav, we set out for Manchester – not an easy place to reach because it is diagonally across the Peak District from here. We were sent up the A1(M) and then across the Pennines on one of the M6-something motorways and eventually, after a very tedious drive, found the ancient buildings of the North Manchester Acute Hospital.

We found Anton in a fairly private bay with a very pleasant carer, who was apparently spending all the days with him. Anton was totally unresponsive to Pat, brushing her hand away grumpily when she tried to touch his. There was nowhere to sit in the bay and after a couple of hours of standing both of us had very aching feet which would scarcely carry us down to the car!

Pat was very upset after seeing her brother, so I set out to get her home fairly quickly. However, neither of us fancied another long motorway journey, so I decided to find a way across the Peak. I programmed our friend James with 'Baslow', which was about halfway from Buxton, where Alistair used to live, and home. We had a pretty tortuous route across North Derbyshire, and I managed to defy James enough to get us to Glossop, the town at the Manchester end of the Snake Pass. This would deposit us at Bamford, where Alistair lived before Buxton.

The great Pennine pass was a good deal longer and more taxing (lots of bends and ups-and-downs) than I remembered, but I enjoyed pushing the Mercedes over the severe ups and downs, making a very scenic run. From Bamford, it was a short run to Baslow (where Pat and had I got married in Baslow Hall, a very posh hotel/restaurant in 2006) and then we followed our regular route to the A61, crossing this just north of Chesterfield, and from there on I could have navigated the route almost blindfold.



We were both totally exhausted when we got home at around 6:30pm, and glad of a very lazy evening – except that I had to empty the car completely because Mercedes Chesterfield would be collecting it for its service in the morning.

### **Wednesday 31 July 2019**

The car was gone before 10am, leaving a nifty little Smart Car parked on our driveway – not a courtesy car so not for our use.

This morning the bloody PC decided to get itself in an appalling tangle, which seemed to be due to a mass of overlapping updates, and was only usable again after lunch. As I type now it is behaving quite normally...

The car was returned in good time, but didn't seem to have been cleaned very thoroughly.

### **Monday 5 August 2019**

My first stepson, Steve came over with his wife Sue yesterday afternoon. We had a thoroughly enjoyable time, with a snacky high tea. I gave Steve a conducted tour of the Mercedes, which was duly admired.

This morning Pat had an arranged rendezvous with Rachael, who owns the company which supplies Anton's, clearing stuff out of his house on the basis that he will never go back there.

She phoned me at around midday and said that the doctor in charge of Anton's case wanted to see her at the hospital and wouldn't tell her anything over the phone. It looks like another trip across to Manchester for us tomorrow which we won't do over the motorway network we used last time. We'll start on the M1 to junction 35 before heading off westward through the peak to a reasonable launching point for switching James on for the last stretch in North Manchester.

### **Tuesday 6 August 2019**

Yesterday's plan worked well, though we had to pick up Pat's sister Jackie at home in Killamarsh. She plotted an easy route to the M1 Northbound and we turned off at Junction 35. After a while I handed the route-finding over to the the Garmin and we found the North Manchester General Hospital quite easily. Anton was actually sitting up and having a drink when we got to his bay, though still not responding to any of us. We had a long, informative meeting with one of the young consultants before navigating back to Baslow, but avoiding the Snake this time. We had lunch at Rowleys bar, dropped Jackie off and hurried home to liberate our poor neglected dog. His reaction to our arrival was a series of mad dashes, worthy of a racing greyhound, from one end of the house to the other and back again.

### **Wednesday 21 August 2019**

Pat has been working incredibly hard to find a nursing or care home to which Anton can be transferred from hospital in Manchester, but the challenges he will present to anyone caring for him are being revealed as even greater than we have realised until very recently.

Probably because she has spent so much time poring over documents and gazing at the screen, her back locked up very badly on Monday, leaving

her unable to do anything constructive, but it had eased by this morning and she has been doing domestic stuff normally.

I have an appointment at Doncaster Royal Infirmary tomorrow afternoon. This should have been today but the Uro-Oncology Nurse Specialist Team changed it. I had been waiting impatiently to see Mr Leveckis to discuss the options for treatment presented by Mr Noon in a letter to my GP and copied to me on the 19 July. My initial instinctive preference for total prostate removal had been blurred and more recently I have been favouring the 'watchful waiting' plan which has kept our friend John going for several years. The relevant paragraph of Mr Noon's letter reads as follows:

*'...given the fact that he [me] has organ confined prostate cancer and he is seventy six I think surgical or radio therapy options and indeed watchful waiting would all be reasonable strategies. The patient is going to communicate his treatment decision.'*

I don't know why or how the nurse team has managed to hijack my appointment for today and transfer it to them, but I will find out tomorrow.

As I understand it, watchful waiting means I have a PSA (prostate specific antigen) blood test taken every week or so and a significant increase will sound the cancer alarm (my level at diagnosis was 7, about double the average normal for my age). Otherwise, I can just live normally (but with fingers crossed!).

### **Thursday 3 October 2019**

I had an appointment with Mr Leveckis on Tuesday 17 September, which was only two weeks ago this Tuesday though it seems much longer. We had a very enjoyable discussion (we seem to share similar senses of humour, which makes dealing with cancer much more pleasant than it might be!) and agreed to go for the watchful waiting option. Before we left I was given a letter for another appointment on the 10 December with its associated blood-test form, which I can get done at our local hospital two weeks ahead.

I have had a very nasty chest bug for a few days. With the aid of Sudafed and Benyllin I am managing to control the worst of the symptoms, but I feel pretty grotty.

We had a nasty shock a couple of days ago. We expected Anton to be transferred on Tuesday to a residential/nursing home quite near here which seemed to tick all the boxes. Then we heard that the home had suddenly decided after all that they would not be able to meet his needs. Given that all he seems to need is a bed to sleep his days away on, this doesn't make much sense. Pat was heartbroken by this development and still hadn't got over the shock this morning. I spent most of a night planning to register a complaint with the Care Quality Commission, but we have calmed down a bit since then.

Later on Pat got a message from Sharon, Anton's new (and profoundly deaf) Social Worker from Sheffield City Council. She had been looking at possible alternative homes for Anton and had found what she was fairly sure was another promising one and would be visiting it tomorrow. It is

about the same distance from here as the other one. We had a look on the Web and Pat thought the home looked promising.

I think my symptoms are improving a little, though if I start coughing it is still difficult to stop the spasms. I'm hoping to be well enough to drive Pat to see Anton in Manchester next week, if that proves to be necessary in spite of Sharon's success – and that the traffic conditions will be a lot better than on the last epic.

This afternoon I put my infected respiratory tubes to the test in preparation for the delivery of a large builder's bag of assorted hardwood logs, scheduled for between 9:30 and 11:30 tomorrow from a promising new supplier and at the same price as the one who has started letting us down. I tidied the wood shed and cleared the decks for barrowing the logs from the forecourt to the shed. I did a variety of other odd garden jobs and gathered a big bag full of Bailey's generous dumps – he seems to be able to mass-produce doggy-poo! The right shoulder was a bit sore when I finished, and I just hope I'll be able to deploy both arms and get the logs moved quickly.

It might seem to be a bit early to be stocking up on fuel but the temperature was just three degrees Celsius when I took Bailey for his walk at 8:15am today. For compensation today's was a beautiful sunny morning.

#### **Friday 4 October 2019**

After early-morning temperatures of around 3 degrees this week, my day started at 11 degrees, with a light drizzle. Bailey and I clocked 12 minutes 51 seconds for the shorter of our two regular walks, the shortest time of the week.

I had prepared almost everything for the log delivery and went out after breakfast to get the car as far out of the way as possible. I wrote this at around 9:45am while waiting for the van to arrive. As soon as it had arrived I got changed – mainly into trousers with plenty of pockets – and did a quick run to Sainsbury's and then Aldi. I just remembered to add 'Magnums' to the Aldi selection of my list because both the ice-cream and the chocolate coating are far nicer than those of 'real' Magnums.

Except, of course, that I probably wouldn't be able to taste the difference because my sense of taste has almost totally deserted me in the past few weeks or months. Nothing seems to taste of anything at all, which is a disaster for an old foodie (and drinkie) like me. A good example is my morning orange juice: I discovered months ago that the Co-op's freshly-squeezed 'with bits' juice tasted far better than the Sainsbury's equivalent. Now both taste like dish-water. Even chocolate is almost tasteless.

The quick run to Sainsbury's and Aldi was anything but – the first being suprisingly busy – but I got myself and the goods bought and brought home in time for lunch. There was a very black sky and quite a bit of rain as we ate, but it dried up later and in spite of a severe attck of 'supermarket feet' and the damage done to my bad shoulder by moving trolleys and carrying over-full bags of shopping I managed to get three barrow-loads of logs transferred from their builder's bag on our forecourt to the wood shed at the back of the house. By 3pm I decided that enough

was enough, partly prompted by some sarcasm from Pat. Typing this, a good deal of sweat is running from my forehead to my face.

I heard back from my 'pen pal' Ken, who had read the most recent part of this diary after I have managed to remember how to export it as a PDF file and use 1&1's control panel to upload it. He responded later with sad tales of his health which made my prostate stuff seem pretty tame.

## **Tuesday 8 October 2019**

I got the remaining logs and the bag down from the forecourt to the wood shed yesterday, having recovered at last from the epic trip to Manchester we had done on Sunday. This had proved to be a good choice of day because the usually insanely busy roads in and out of the city were quite quiet. We left the house at 9:15am, letting the satnav to take us first to the John Denver Unit in the suburb of Prestwich to collect Anton's personal belongings, including a brand-new 32in flat-screen TV, and then to the North Manchester General Hospital. We stayed for a few hours, pleased to find Anton relaxed and looking healthy but totally unaware of our presence, and then let the Garmin find the M1 for us. This allowed us to get to Catcliffe on the eastern outskirts of Sheffield in time for a Sunday lunch at Whitby's, our third-favourite venue for fish and chips after Rick Stein's two in Padstow and Newquay. I had a Peroni Italian beer so Pat drove us the rest of the way home. I was agreeably surprised by how well I had been driving when we completed the round trip. Motto: only drive in and out of big cities on a Sunday.

We shouldn't have had to make this trip, because Sheffield Social Services are supposed to be finding Anton a nursing home within a short distance of our house, but every step forward seems to run into obstacles.

Yesterday I got several more barrowloads of logs down to the wood shed, getting enough out of the builder's bag to allow me to lift it onto the barrow and take it down to the shed. This morning I stacked the last of the logs in the shed, creating an impressive wall of firewood.

Another important job was done on the house this morning, with five of the original double-glazed windows in the kitchen, which have been developing more and more condensation for some years, replaced by a company called Cloudy2Clear at last at a cost of £500.

After lunch I went down the garden to the summer-house to find the various accessories needed to keep the woodburner going: our large wicker log basket with its tailor-made rug, the heat-resistant leather gloves which came with the stove, Pat's much-loved brass 'fire irons' and the very 'country-house' bag which I use to bring in the logs. Everything had been packed in the basket, making it a much too heavy for me to carry up the garden, so I resorted to the builder's barrow in which I had transported all the new logs to the shed. The rug and basket were installed beside the fireplace, the jug containing the irons at the side of the hearth and the log bag in a discreet corner of the conservatory. I tried my felling axe for splitting the heavy hardwood logs on the way to putting the barrow away. It took two swings but it split a thick log beautifully.

It was wet and windy outside but too warm to justify a log fire.

## **Wednesday 9 October 2019**

Feeling quite rested after a good night's sleep but still tired after a very busy three days, I decided to treat myself to a lie-in after a 7:30am pee, but towards 8:30 my decision was taken over by the banging of our wheelie-bin being returned after cleaning and excited barking from Bailey who would be waiting eagerly to greet the cleaner. However, nobody rang the doorbell and, by the time I had hurriedly dressed myself and rushed outside with £2 in my hand, there was no sign of his van. No matter – I would have to pay him on the next visit.

As I was fully awake and up I decided to give the poor dog a much-overdue walk. I took a cup of tea up to Pat and told her not to rush, and Bailey and I managed our short lap in just under 15 minutes.

After coffee I decided to get a big bag of logs ready for the first fire of the Autumn but my hickory-handled felling axe's head was badly rusted. I looked for various power sanders and settled for my Black & Decker orbital sander. I cut a length off a very coarse belt-sander band and got it installed on the orbital one, though this needed a Mole wrench to lift each of the the end grips. The rust disappeared very quickly and I sprayed the axe head with WD40 before using it. The hardwood logs from Retford were much more resistant to splitting than the softer larch ones from last year's deliveries, most needing two hits to split. I put as many as I would be able to lift in the bag, including thinner ones for kindling, and put the bag in the conservatory to keep warm and dry. Then I dug a few *Sunday Times* sections out of the kitchen boot basket. I tore them into single pages, each of which will screw up into a ball, ten or twelve of which will light the stove every time. Finally, I wrapped the oiled head of my trusty axe in a heavy carrier bag to keep the wet out and the rust off.

We have had no news from Social Services about finding a residential home for Anton. The waiting is really getting under Pat's skin, and mine too to a lesser extent. I find I'm quite surprised that today is only Wednesday.

## **Tuesday 8 October 2019**

...and now today is Tuesday.

My respiratory bug seems to be calming down now, with the aid of Sudafed decongestant and Benyllin expectorant.

Nothing much has happened over the past few days. Pat did get a call from the Social Worker to say that Anton would be transferred from the hospital in north-eastern Manchester to the care/nursing home in Worksop today if they could get a private ambulance and an escort. She was understandably impatient for news, and I could hear her banging about in the kitchen as I wrote this. To kill a little more time I took the offcuts of vacuum-impregnated wood left by the conservatory team down the garden and stashed them in the shed. Then, just as we had eaten a makeshift lunch, Judy from the hospital phoned to say he would be leaving tomorrow morning. Great relief all round. Pat is naturally concerned about him coping with another sudden change of 'home', but he has already been moved from home to hospital in Sheffield, from there to a special unit in Sheffield, then to a special unit in Manchester and finally to the present hospital. Given that he is almost totally blind, he probably isn't very aware of where he is.

Anton's social worker kept Pat supplied with SMS updates and confirmed that he had been admitted to the home much earlier than we expected. During the early evening she even came to see us, reporting that Anton had coped far better than we anticipated with the long ambulance ride and his arrival at the home.

### **Wednesday 16 October 2019**

Pat was hoping to visit him this afternoon. I had intended to go with her but I felt quite unwell when I got up, with loose bowels and cold sweats, and decided not to risk infecting a vulnerable population if this was an infection.

She was with him for several hours and came back quite upset by the experience.

### **Thursday 17 October 2019**

We had planned to go over and collect some of the most valuable stuff from Anton's house – the fridge we bought for him, our 32in TV and anything else we could and should fit in the car, but Pat was feeling quite weary after yesterday and I still hadn't got back to 100%, so we decided to postpone this until tomorrow. We're hoping to mobilise Aidan and Alistair over the weekend to sort through old tools and stuff, maybe with a hired van.

I contacted the GPs this morning because my vision seems to be deteriorating very quickly and I haven't seen to consultant since about this time last year and the year before. When the doctor called back at around midday he said I needed an up-to-date eye test before seeing the consultant, presumably to tell him how much my vision has changed. This to be sent to the hospital and the GP before a referral is made. Very disappointing!

I also raised the matter of my loss of taste, mentioning that I had had quite a severe bout of coughing and sinus congestion, was also surprised to be advised to stop taking Sudafed as this can impair the sense of smell.

I phoned SpecSavers and now have an eye-test booked for 12:20 on Sunday – pretty brisk service!

### **Wednesday 23 October 2019**

I had a thorough eye test and examination at SpecSavers on Sunday and was reassured that the ophthalmologist didn't find anything sinister. My floaters are the main problem, but I just have to concentrate on keeping them out of my way.

John Rose did an excellent job of painting and repainting in the newly roofed conservatory for a surprisingly modest £110, and this morning I set about painting the recess around the double doors between the sitting room and the conservatory, the walls of which had been badly stained by the last two severe rainstorms. I wasn't confident that my dodgy right shoulder would allow me to do the whole job and was ageably surprised when it did. Working lefthanded was easier than I expected and our two small two-tread metal stepladders gave me the necessary reach. I now have to wait until all the paint dries fully to see if any retouching will be needed. I am quite chuffed that I managed this job, including precision

cutting-in while teetering on the ladders as their feet sank into the carpet.

#### **Thursday 24 October 2019**

When it was fully dried the painting I did yesterday turned out not to have covered the water stains completely. I will need to go over it again, but I need some decent daylight, and today is wet, dank and gloomy. So, with nothing better to do I reviewed my current account transactions, updated my spreadsheet and made an online payment to my Sainsbury's MasterCard.

Pat was feeling very unwell and spent most of the day fast asleep in bed.

#### **Friday 25 October 2019**

Even worse weather – and light – today, with heavy rain forecast for the whole afternoon and evening in our area. We're hoping to get a visit from my daughter Sarah and her husband Dave, but the drive up from Peterborough – where the rain is forecast to be less heavy – may be a bit too much of a challenge. I am writing this at around 12:30 and the rain here is quite gentle, as it has been since it started just as Bailey and I were getting home from a good, brisk walk, with my legs and feet feeling much better than they have for a while.

Pat has been feeling better, but she soon gets tired if she tries to do much around the house.

Sarah and Dave managed to get up in spite of the horrible driving conditions and we walked down to the Blue Bell pub in the centre of the village without getting too wet. The home-made fish and chips were very good and reasonably priced and we had a great gossip about all sorts of stuff. We walked back and soon after that they headed off back to Peterborough. We didn't see Sarah's *WhatsApp* message confirming safe arrival.

#### **Saturday 26 October 2019**

I tested her after breakfast and it turned out that she had sent a home-safe message but to a wrong chat box.

This morning Pat went off to meet Aidan at Anton's so that they could salvage anything else before the council takes the house over.

#### **Saturday 26 October 2019**

I tested her after breakfast and it turned out that she had sent a home-safe message but to a wrong chat box.

This morning Pat went off to meet Aidan at Anton's so that they could salvage anything else before the council takes the house over.

#### **Sunday 27 October 2019**

I unloaded all the stuff she had left in the car this morning and stashed it in the conservatory.

#### **Thursday 31 October 2019**

I didn't have much to report since Monday, but we managed to contact Sheffield Social Services, whose Executor Services manage Anton's

finances, and they arranged to terminate his tenancy in the family house – something that felt very strange to Pat.

On Tuesday morning I discovered that Excel had suddenly decided to stop me editing my bank account and morning walk spreadsheets. I was still banging my head against a brick wall at bedtime on Wednesday and this morning. Updating these sheets has become a more-or-less religious ritual and the possibility of not being able to continue this was very worrying, because the bank-account sheet goes back to May 2003! I have thought often about deleting the earlier entries, but I have never plucked up the courage.

This morning I suddenly spotted that the Num Lock light on the keyboard was out. I pressed the key and to my immense relief the program immediately started working properly! A visit to the bank website got the sheet up-to-date within a few minutes.

Things have settled down considerably here, now that Anton is established in the care home. Pat isn't completely satisfied with the accommodation but is much more relaxed now.

### **Thursday 14 November 2019**

I have been having bouts of severe pain on the inside of my horribly deformed right ankle – the one with the failed total replacement. Yesterday's was the worst yet. The Voltarol gel which is now generously included among my repeat prescriptions helped more than I thought it would, but among other complications it stopped me going to Huddersfield with Pat for Barney's graduation ceremony.

I took Bailey for a very brief (6¼ minutes compared with walk this morning – brief because it started raining just as we left home. The day went on to become more and more unpleasant, with heavy cloud, strongish winds and moderate rain.

We have been very lucky with the weather. Quite a few of the roads in Worksop have been deeply flooded, and a few lengths of the footpaths I use with Bailey have been under water. As I write this at 14:50 things look really grim outside. We are pretty close to the Don Valley, and are very lucky not to have much low-lying ground on the roads or in our own land.

I spent the after-lunch interval lighting some of my new hardwood logs on the log-burner to fight against the dirty weather – the second burn since the chimney was swept and the new load of logs was delivered. The need to stay near the fire allowed me to keep up with the tennis from the O2 Arena.

### **Friday 22 November 2019**

Another lazy week as far as this diary is concerned, with nothing much to report. I have just come in from splitting a bag of logs – mixed larch and hardwood – which have caught a lot of spray from the ridiculously wet weather we have been having lately. I have had a couple of fires and everything has burned well in spite of the damp. I have left this morning's consignment in the bag to air in the conservatory, which is still pretty warm in spite of the new opaque roof.



My vision is very bad this morning, even with the prescription drops I use. If I am looking at anything with a bright light source to one side the floaters in my vitreous humour flares and blurs what I am trying to resolve. I don't think my recent eye examination has revealed enough. The screen and the keyboard are both blurred as I type this. I am becoming more and more anxious about the future of my vision. It's bad enough living with a lazy left eye for 76 years but when the trusty good one starts to let me down quite badly I begin to worry seriously. I am still confident when driving, thank goodness...

#### **Thursday 23 January 2020**

Apologies to my one known loyal reader for two months without a single entry. The good news that Anton was established in his new care home didn't stay good for very long. It seems that his lung cancer got the better of him about a month ago, and Pat was then embroiled in funeral arrangements. The ceremony took place just three days ago. There was a terrific turn-out of family, friends and members of Sheffield Deaf Club for a lovely ceremony where the minister's words were sign-interpreted by the lady who assists Sharon, Anton's proud deaf social worker. She was lovely to watch, obviously doing more dramatic signing than was needed purely for understanding. What she did was more like a ballet performance.

After months of hard work on Pat's part, everything has finally calmed down, with very little else for her.

#### **Friday 24 January 2020**

I saw a very charming black lady GP at the surgery two or three weeks ago because my nasal problems were becoming much worse. I had lost almost all my sense of taste (me, the lifelong gourmet!) and my mouth just tasted strongly salty. She referred me to the hospital straight away and I had an appointment with the Ear, Nose and Throat consultant, Mr Hattab, at Bassetlaw Hospital yesterday afternoon. Among other things he pushed a very thin, flexible probe up each of my nostrils, which was fairly uncomfortable but only briefly painful. That was my third invasive diagnostic tool after my colonoscopy and cystoscopy. My body can't hold too many secrets! He scheduled me for an MRI scan and told me to see my dentist as soon as possible as I may have an infection spread by what's left of my teeth. I tried phoning the dental surgery around lunchtime today but only got their answering machine.

My next appointment is next Wednesday with Mr Papanna, the orthopaedic consultant who injected something rather good into my painful right shoulder a while ago (which seems to have improved things with the aid of a nightly rub of diclofenac gel). I will ask him whether he has seen the foot and ankle x-rays which the GP arranged some months ago.

Then, on the 24 March I will be seeing Mr Leveckis, my urology consultant, having had a blood test taken a few days before. If my Prostate-Specific Antigen level has risen significantly, we will have to consider treatment for my cancer – surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy).

Meanwhile, more drama at home. I don't seem to have mentioned mentioned the fact that we had a solid tiled roof put on the conservatory and all the UPVC window frame replaced. We are now about to cap this with a completely new kitchen from Wickes. Watch this space...

## **My neck, shoulder and back workout**

Please note: I offer no guarantees that this will work for anyone except myself. It is very important to approach these mobilising exercises cautiously - try them out very slowly and gently. If you feel real pain go no further - there are no prizes for heroes. Maybe go back and try the same move but more gently. The idea is to loosen your joints up slowly and then to maintain the mobility you achieve by regular repetition of the routines. I often don't do any of this for weeks and then, when I get stiff and sore, I do a workout before bed - and sometimes another during the day.

**Neck 1** Stand comfortably with your feet about shoulder-width apart and your arms hanging loosely by your sides or your hands on your hips. Turn your head to one side as far as it will go in reasonable comfort to one side - slowly with no jerking. If, like me, you hear a noise like someone crumpling cellophane, don't panic: be guided by how it feels. Turn to the other side. Return to centre. Repeat about four times to begin with, gradually increasing the number of repetitions - I usually do 8.

**Neck 2** Push your chin down onto your chest and then tip your head slowly back as far as it will go - again in reasonable comfort and without jerking. Repeat the same number of times as for the first exercise.

**Neck 3** Once you have the feel of making the moves slow and carefully, tip your head smoothly to one side as far as you can and then to the other, repeating as before.

**Neck 4** Push your chin as far forward as you can and pull it as far back as you can, repeating as before.

**Neck 5** Finally, drop your chin onto your chest and roll it up to one shoulder, then round to the other shoulder, and repeat. Don't roll it too far round round: I was advised very strongly against this by my physio.

**Shoulders 1** Still standing in the same position, hold your hands facing forwards with the tips of your thumbs touching your shoulders. Push your shoulders down, then reach up with both hands as far as you can go - really reach for the sky. Repeat as before.

**Shoulders 2** Put your arms straight out to the front, holding them loosely and slightly bent with your hands palms-down. Push your hands forwards as far as they will go, straightening your elbows and pulling your shoulders forward. Return to the relaxed position. Repeat as before.

**Shoulders 3** Put your hands together, overlapping them with the backs of the hands against the small of your back - but don't clasp them. Pull your shoulders back and your elbows towards one another, using your back muscles - don't grab hands and pull with your arms. Relax and repeat as before.

**Shoulders 4** With your arms hanging loosely by your sides, rotate your shoulders up, forwards, down and back. Repeat as before. This and the following exercise sound quite easy but can send pains shooting up your neck and into the back of your head, so go carefully and *listen* to your body.

**Shoulders 5** Repeat but rotating up, back, down and forward. Repeat as before.

**Shoulders 6** 'Windmill' your arms out, up and in, crossing them in front of your body. Don't hurl them around but keep the movement slow and controlled. Try to alternate the way they overlap, left in front of right and then right in front of left. Repeat as before.

**Shoulders 7** Repeat the previous movement in the opposite direction: inwards, crossing in front of your body, up, out and down. Repeat as before.

**Spine 1** Spread your feet a little wider apart - say around 18 inches, to give you a solid base for the next exercise. Put your hands flat on your hips or the outside of your thighs, depending on how long your arms are. Now bend sideways, sliding one hand down your thigh as far as it will go and letting the other one ride up. Reverse direction. Repeat as above. This opens up the joints between your vertebrae and helps with sciatica, which is caused by the nerves that serve your legs being trapped between the bones of your spine.

**Spine 2** Sit on the floor with your legs straight out and spread at a comfortable angle. Reach forward with both hands and slide them down one leg as far as they will go comfortably, keeping the leg straight. You should feel the pull behind the knee as the hamstring stretches. Slide your hands back and sit up straight. Repeat as before. Switch to the other leg and repeat. You may find it easier to bend the free leg, even pulling your heel up towards your body. Finally, put one hand on each leg and push towards both feet. Repeat as before. With luck, you should eventually manage to touch your toes, but it may take some weeks of regular workouts.

**Spine 3** Kneel with your hands on the floor, arms straight and parallel with your thighs. Arch your back upwards, pushing your head down. Then arch the other way, pushing the small of your back downwards and lifting your head. Repeat as before.

**Spine 4** Still kneeling, sit on your heels; put your hands on the floor and slide them as far forward as you can, hopefully getting your forehead on the floor even if you have to lift your bum off your heels in the process. Lift up, using your arms rather than your back muscles. Repeat as before. Eventually you'll be able to open your feet wider, sit further down and still get your head on the floor.

**Spine 5** Lie flat on your stomach (you can get there directly from the previous exercise) with your hands, palms-down, under your shoulders. Press up on your arms, but keep your pelvis on the floor - you're not doing push-ups! Lift as high as you can to arch your back to the maximum. Then lower yourself back to the floor. Repeat as before. This too opens up the joints in your lower spine to help relieve sciatica - I sometimes use it in bed if I get pain in the legs at night.

**Spine 6** Finally, lie on your back with your legs bent and your knees raised and together. Stretch your arms out to the sides, palms flat on the floor. Roll your head to one side and simultaneously rotate your knees to the other, keeping them tight together and allowing your hips to rotate and the upper foot to come off the floor. I can get my thigh flat on the

floor and my head rotated nearly 90 degrees in the opposite direction, but I've been using this exercise for years. Rotate your legs and head to the opposite sides. Repeat in a smooth, rhythmic motion. I find this incredibly soothing, like a massage, and I do twice as many repeats as for all the other exercises.

**Finally...** Lie still for a few minutes with your knees still raised and your hands by your sides or on your stomach. Breathe slowly and rhythmically. Then roll over and get to your feet carefully - you don't want to undo all the good work!

### **Exercises for the legs and feet**

Once my knees and ankle began misbehaving, I started working on them, too. This lot are best done before getting out of bed. Kick off the duvet and lie flat on your back with your legs together. Keeping your legs straight, lift one until the hamstrings pull, then bend it, using your hands on your shin to keep the leg fully bent and pull your knee onto your chest. Release the leg and straighten it, keeping it as high as possible, and lower it to the bed. Repeat as with the neck, shoulder and back exercises. Do the same with the other leg. With your feet together, straighten your feet in line with your legs as far as possible (or not at all if you have an ankle fusion!), then pull your toes up towards your knees, maximising the movement of your ankle joints. Release and repeat as before. Rotate one foot, clockwise and then anticlockwise. Repeat with both feet as before. When you get out of bed, do the same number of repeats rising onto tiptoes with your legs a foot or so apart, balancing with a hand on the wall or a dressing-table if necessary.

### **Warning**

I'll repeat: be guided by the pain and don't strain or jerk. The idea is to increase the mobility of your joints gradually. If any of these moves causes particular discomfort, don't risk doing it - just leave it out and maybe try again in a week when the others might have done some good. Be alive to what your body tells you and be creative. Use my suggestions as a starting point and try variations until you have built a routine that works for you.

Good luck, fellow sufferers!

This diary started as a *Word* document, first because I want it to look good in hard copy as well as on the website and second because it is a major writing project and is much easier to write and edit in a word-processor than in the only web-page editor I now have available, the *Composer* window of the *SeaMonkey* browser, which uses such a small font that I can hardly see what I am doing. I am now using *OpenOffice Writer* rather than Microsoft *Word* because it allows fast and simple export as a PDF document which can be displayed in a web browser. After each edit, the document is saved, originally as a *Word* document but now in *OpenOffice's* preferred ODF format, and then exported as a PDF, which was uploaded to the website using *FileZilla*, an open-source FTP (File Transfer Protocol) client which allowed very rapid login and transfer. For some reason *FileZilla* stopped working sometime in the summer of 2017, but I found an excellent alternative, *WebSpace Explorer*, which is part of the 1&1 Control Panel. This suffered a hiccup in August 2017 but was soon fixed.