

HIDDEN GEM – Published 7th December 2017

Whilst out running over the years I've discovered many hidden gems as I puff and plod along the winding footpaths and tracks around the area and I'm always happily surprised when I discover another hidden gem, as I did recently.

Taplow Lake, just off the Bath Road isn't exactly hidden and is well used by those who favour pastimes of an aquatic nature and I have run past it many times heading to the Jubilee River and Thames towpath.

On this particular jog, I saw a sign for Lake House Café. Having not seen the sign before, I decided to investigate and what a little gem I found.

The café, which includes homemade food and a selection of teas, coffees and local beers, is part of the ongoing development of the lake by a local family of 30 years standing.

Open Wednesday to Sundays, it has a relaxed friendly atmosphere about the place and notices of events convey the feeling that it is aiming to be a local community venture and more.

When we seem to be no more than a sugar sachet throw from a coffee shop chain, it's nice to see a small independent family run business like this offering an alternative to the coffee clones.

Lake House Café is worth a visit and you don't have to go jogging in lycra to find it. If you know where Taplow Lake is, you'll find this hidden gem easily and you won't be disappointed. Tell them Terry sent you!

CRACKING UP – Published 3rd October 2017

If I was to be asked what I thought the most common feature on today's mobile phones is, my answer might surprise some.

Purely on personal observations, I wouldn't say it's the camera with its megawhatsitpixels or the abundance of Apps or the ability to make a phone call, which I believe some still do, no, I would say the most common feature is... The cracked screen!

I've lost count the amount of times I've been shown photos of other people's family, pets, dinners and yet another 'selfie', through a cobweb of cracks and splinters.

For some, the expensive of a repair outweighs the inconvenience of a shattered screen, but for others, it seems to be a badge of honour, especially those of an enviable young age.

It appears to up one's street cred by purchasing a new unblemished, expensive phone, take it out of its box, set it up, then chuck it on the floor.

It does seem currently that to have an undamaged item, just isn't cool anymore. Take jeans, the more ripped to shreds they are the more fashionable and then there is distressed furniture and clothing that comes already stained, dirty and moth eaten. What's wrong with nice or am I just getting too old.

Oh wait a minute, that's it, I am getting too old, excuse me why I go a drop my phone out of the bedroom window and where did I put those scissors and that nice pair of comfortable jeans I like.

IT'S ANOTHER LANGUAGE – Published 3rd August 2017

Did you know if someone is 'Sick', they're not? If a person is 'Bad', they're good and who's your 'Bae'? If you do know, then you are probably under nineteen years old or really down wiv da kids!

Having two teenage daughters, I'm flummoxed at the alternative meaning of certain words uttered by the younger generation. Words and phrases I thought I understood have now taken on incongruous meanings. For example...

'Sick' is no longer a negative prognoses but a term to define something that is rather excellent as in 'This column is really sick!'

Someone or something that is 'Bad' is to be revered, as I found out when I complained to a young server in a café that my meal tasted bad and they took it as a compliment.

So who is your 'Bae'? Well, apparently, it's someone you're close to and you have feeling for... Oh no, wait, you don't have 'Feelings', you have 'feels'.

Some say this violation of vocabulary is a consequence of the multimedia age, but I think it's worse than that. It's a sign that I'm getting old and seemed to have obliterated the memory of when I was a puppy and things were 'Snazzy', and 'Funky', and we saved up our 'Mulha for a Saturday night boogie at the disco!'

So perhaps I shouldn't fret and go with the flow with this new sick lit vocabulary but I can't help feeling that if I did, the word 'Wally' might make a comeback!

MOORE THE MERRIER – Published 1st June 2017

One of my heroes died recently and by the number of condolences and tributes that filled the press and social media, a hero to many.

The day Sir Roger Moore died was a sad day. It was only hours after the atrocities at the Manchester Arena that his passing was announced.

Sir Roger would not have wanted to distract any attention away from this terrible event, for apart from being a very popular TV and film star and of course, 007, on seven missions, he was a humanitarian. As a Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF since 1991, he travelled the globe as a dedicated advocate of children's welfare and he would have been appalled by the tragic and senseless loss of young lives.

That the evening news that day only carried two stories, Manchester and the death of Sir Roger Moore is testimony to his popularity.

The constant from the tributes has been what a nice man Roger was. People I know who have worked with and met him, all echo the sentiment and I can confirm it.

I was lucky enough to have met him a couple of years ago, before his one man show in Reading. 'It's such a pleasure to meet you, Sir Roger' I said in my best fanboy/middle-aged man greeting, and it was. He had been part of my life as I had grown up watching Simon Templar, Lord Brett Sinclair and, my obsession in life, James Bond. So you can imagine how I felt when he shook my hand and replied 'And it's such a pleasure to meet you, too.' before we chatted all too briefly. A simple gesture that made my day and made Mr Moore the legend he was and will remain.

Rest in Peace, Sir Rog. Nobody did it better.

POINTS FOR POSITIVITY – Published 30th March 2017

They say when you're down the only way is up and that's certainly true for Burnham FC. They would be the first to admit this hasn't been a great season and they could have got more points shopping a Tesco's, but I do admire their positivity.

I'm not a regular at The Gore, but I do follow their progress on the Advertiser's back pages and the optimistic outpouring from the club after each disappointment, proves that it's not over until the final whistle is blown.

With the team's line up changing more times than Take That and managers going in and out in a frenzied hokey-cokey fashion, stability and consistency at Burnham is as rare as a win, but every week, no matter the size of the defeat, encouragement is abound.

On paper, every game sees this plucky side closer to relegation, but in this paper, statements from the manager and team eluding to the possibility that escaping the inevitable is possible, is always key. It can't be easy remaining so buoyant when you're propping up the table, but in a time where negativity is almost a given, I applaud this attitude.

By time this is published, Burnham's fate will have been decided, but whatever the outcome, I'd like to congratulate my local team for their tenacity and belief that no matter how difficult the task may be, 'giving up' is not an option, and to say that if there were points for positivity, they'd be top of the league.

I'VE HAVEN'T GOT ENOUGH ON MY PLATE – Published 26th January 2017

This country appears to be in a bit of a crisis and it has nothing to do with recent European discord. No, it's much worse. We appear to be running out of plates and dishes.

I noticed this slow decline over the past few years or so when frequenting various eateries and being presented with meals on slabs of slate, wooden paddles, chopping boards, mirrors, miniature wicker baskets, tiles and frying pans.

It seems that due to this paucity of plates and decline in dishes, chefs have to resort to other means to serve us our food. It's been reported that some culinary creatives have gone to more extreme lengths to combat this crockery calamity by issuing orders on shovels and other gardening implements, cap and slippers, wheel hubs, dog bowls and even the kitchen sink.

Also, whereas a plate had the ability to contain a full meal, without its convenience, our food now comes in a concoction of curious containers, from which you have to create your own spread, in what one might call a 'Piece Meal' fashion.

Therefore, this is an appeal from those of us who do not want to eat off tennis rackets, dustbin lids or an old sock, if you have any spare plates or dishes you could donate to these unfortunate restaurants, do so and save their embarrassment of having to make do.

Oh and please hurry as I'm in a restaurant where all the meals are served in colanders and I've just ordered soup!

WHEN IS CHRISTMAS? – Published 24th November 2016

Now don't get me wrong, I love Christmas, always have, but I saw something on Facebook recently that struck home. It said 'There are twelve days of Christmas and not one of them is in November!'

How true, but as the years past I see Christmas beginning earlier and earlier. It seems that no sooner as the holiday tan has started to fade then the onset of acute tinsillitis and jingle tills begins.

Only last weekend I saw a local house decked with illuminations. The TV is awash with commercials vying for our sentimental heartstrings and overworked wallets and the likes of Wham, Wizzard, Slade and the usual suspects are already planting their retro festive earworms. Even the coffee shops have got in on the act with the release of seasonal themed cardboard cups and it's still only November!

I know why it is being done and religious associations apart, I can't help feeling that this mass marketing is somewhat diluting Christmas. Starting before all the leaves have fallen from the tree means that come Christmas Eve everything looks worn and tired and most are sick of hearing what George Michael did last Christmas.

I realise that we need to prepare for the big day, but surely twenty-four days before is ample time, but then again I'm a man and Christmas Eve is ample time for me!

Seriously though, let's start Christmas at the same time as advent calendars and not when Summer time ends and the clocks go back!

NO ROOM FOR SHOWROOMS – Published 2nd September 2016

Regular readers, you both know who you are, will be familiar with my Bath Road love/hate relationship.

I love to hate it, with its plethora of traffic lights betwixt Maidenhead and Slough always on red and where speed limit signs mock you with promises of forty miles an hour travel, when they should be referring to feet rather than miles. Well, now I have another reason to sour this road-rage relationship,

Over the years, between the Huntercombe roundabout and the Dover Road junction stretch in Chippenham, I've seen empty buildings reduced to rubble and waited in anticipation for their replacements. Rumours of restaurants, sports-centres and recreational areas have all been just that. Instead, each phoenix that rises from the ashes appears to be sporting the logo of yet another brand of car!

The last time I looked there were twelve car showrooms on this short length of the A4, but that was an hour ago, so there could be more!

Why are so many car manufactures wanting to sell their automotive wares in Chippenham? Does the demographics deem this 'the' place to purchase a car? Is there something in the air - apart from the whiff of KFC – that compels people to buy a new car when in Chippenham?

I'd be interested to know why we have more cars showrooms than you can shake a finance plan at, in such a small space, and how they survive with such an abundance of competition and can or should we expect more?

JUNK FOOD – Published 21st July 2016

I was in a local retail park recently, which is also home to a famous fast food Drive-in emporium, where its clientele are apparently ‘Loving it’. Unfortunately, these edible romances aren’t as cosy as first appears.

The majority of relationships are based on love at first bite, but there are those who practice the ‘Love ‘em and leave ‘em’ method. On my visit, the remnants of those loveless culinary couplings could be seen strewn uncaringly to the wind. Moments of flesh –on-flesh activity reduced to a discarded pile of unwanted memories by those who’ve had their fun and left without remorse.

I’m of course talking about those selfish individuals who have their burger meals and shakes in their car, enjoy the moment together in private, and then deposit what is left of the affair out of their window and drive away without as much of a second glance back.

The litter in the carpark, a mere chicken nugget throw away from the restaurant, was disgusting. Branded boxes of left overs, sauced–stained bags and plastic beakers of residue lay discarded by lazy, litter louts with the table manners that pigs would find offensive.

How these people think this behaviour is acceptable is beyond me, considering there are plenty of receptacles provided that would welcome the debris. Obviously, it’s far too much effort for some to get out of their cars and look for a bin and their IQ.

It gives a whole new sorrowful meaning to the phrase ‘Junk Food’!

OLD TECHNOLOGY – Published 19th May 2016

My parents are in their late seventies and eighties and they have never really embraced the world of computers and the internet. They know of the digital world and the amazing things within, but to them 'Online' is how a train gets around, 'Twitter' is what birds do and 'E-mail' is what a Yorkshire postman delivers.

I'm sure they are not the only ones. I know there are some cool 'Silver Surfers' out there who know their Windows from their Macs, but there are many more of a certain age who freely admit that they believe one of them you clean and the other you wear.

So why are senior citizens, like my parents, increasingly being expected to go online to pay bills, fill in forms and communicate when they don't even have a computer in the house?

In my parent's case, I help out where I can, but not everyone in their retirement has this family 'technical support' or wants to start trying to understand the wonders of the web at their time of life.

I know the call for a 'Paperless Society' is loud, but there is a generation, pre baby boomers, that would prefer to write than type, post than upload and not have to listen to an automated voice with a particular obsession about multiple choice questions, every time they ring up to enquire about bills and services. That last one I personally could do without as well.

Technology is wonderful but it's not for everyone.

MARATHON CHALLENGE – Published 24th March 2016

Those who read my column, and I thank both of you, will no doubt be fed up with me going on about running the London Marathon next month. Well, you'll be pleased to know this will be the last time I will drone on about training, blisters and how I hope to finish before nightfall.

Saying that, I won't stop mentioning that the real reason I'm running 26 miles is to collect some cash for the eating disorder charity 'Beat' who help and raise awareness for those who suffer from anorexia and other eating disorders.

Last year the Advertiser did a very supportive piece on how anorexia affected my daughter and our family. Very tough days that are thankfully for us becoming memories, but for others the battle goes on while the awareness of this disease, for that is what it is, is still lacking.

A recent article by a respected journalist that likened anorexia to a form of narcissism, especially in the young, shows how little is known about the anguish and suffering both the sufferer and their families endure.

That is why I want to raise £1500 to help 'Beat' (www.b-eat.co.uk) help others, by jogging for a few hours around London. If you would like to sponsor me, I have a page at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/TerryAdlam> and any donation would be gratefully received, but more importantly, would go a long way in helping the public realise this isn't about dieting and vanity, it goes much deeper.

Running the London Marathon is tough, but beating an eating disorder is much, much tougher. Thank you.

GET GOING – Published 28th January 2016

Is it just me, but is January like an old car on an icy cold morning, in that it takes time to get going?

I seem to be constantly playing 'catch up' with various daily tasks and like a lethargic orangutan, find it very difficult to get back into the swing of things deemed normal. It feels like my post-Christmas spirit of frenetic activity and intermittent idleness, permeates into the opening weeks of my new year.

It probably didn't help that this year both my daughters had significant birthdays on the same day, even before the decorations were down, and we started the upheaval that goes with the arrival of a new kitchen sooner than most New Year resolutions have become null and void.

As my regular reader will know, I'm running the London Marathon this year (sponsorship details at uk.virginmoneygiving.com/TerryAdlam) and even getting out to train has not been without its delays and erratic excuses and don't talk to me about planning holidays, more decorating, sorting out accounts, paying bills and other interfering lifestyle chores .

I hope that as January recedes I'll be able to return to a timetable of perceived normality and I can cope and roll with whatever 2016 has to throw at me and... Oh wait a minute, I've got a column to write for an illustrious local newspaper, I knew there was something. What can I write about? I don't know where to start! See, January does this to me.

Is it just me?

IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME – Published 3rd December 2015

Here we are again, a few weeks away from Christmas and just a limited amount of time to spend trudging around the shops and the internet for presents that will probably be exchanged in January. Time to squander writing out Christmas cards to acquaintances, some of whom won't send any back as they're sending the 'stamp money' to 'charity' or reverting to social media seasonal greetings.

Time to be inundated with TV commercials with varying 'Aww' content to tug at the purse strings. Picking up TV guides the size of industrial catalogues and wondering how many times you can hear 'I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday' without screaming.

Not enough time to concoct an excuse to get out of that office party or fit into that outfit you brought in August.

No time to get the decorations down and spend eons untangling the lights and illuminating the outside of the house, annoying the neighbours and bringing financial cheer to your power supplier.

Hardly any time to take a course in extreme diplomacy to try and not upset the relatives you will and will not be visiting.

Is there time to buy the turkey? Boil the sprouts to oblivion, buy enough nuts to feed a troop of monkeys, get enough booze in to open an off licence, wrap presents, clean the house, placate the kids, see a panto, watch 'Eric & Ernie', overwork the credit card and smile and wish everyone a Merry Christmas?

Of course there is... Merry Christmas!

DON'T PANIC - Published 8th October 2015

As a Cippenhamite I thought I might like to add my twopennieworth about the forthcoming end of civilisation as we know it, sorry, I mean about the closing of Station Road.

Don't get me wrong, as an idea, it's up there with chocolate teapots and I'm sure there must be easier ways to carry out road traffic assessments, especially in the age of computers simulations and data retrieval. Cutting off a main thoroughfare to the A4 and M4 for those north of a railway bridge that is so low, I've seen cyclist duck, does seem ludicrous, but what do I know?

I do know that for a couple of days it will be chaos, but I don't think it's going to be the 'Carmaggedon' some are expecting because we've been there, done that. It's not new.

Remember the gridlock that the Olympics and then the new Bishop Centre was going to bring? If I remember, a few years ago, Station Road was actually closed for a few weeks while the bridge was repaired. All caused consternation and worry, but in the end was never as bad as first envisaged, because as humans and motorists we learn to adapt.

We all moan, and I include myself in this, about the inconvenience this 'experiment' is going to cause, but hey, let's not panic, life will go on, maybe a little slower than normal and who knows, experiments sometimes work and it might just all turn out for the best in the end.

BEAT IT - Published 3rd September 2015

Did you know that over 1.6 million men and women are affected by eating disorders in the UK and the disorder claims more lives than any other mental illness?

I wasn't unaware of this until three years ago when my teenage daughter developed anorexia. It was traumatic times for her and our family, but I'm pleased to say that she has made an almost full recovery with help from the BAU unit in Wokingham, our GP, school, friends, family and above all, her own strength and courage.

That's why, next April, 29 years since I last ran it, I will be running the London Marathon raising money and awareness for 'Beat', the charity for eating disorders.

I want to raise at least £1500, which isn't too problematic, but running a marathon at 56 years old instead of 27 isn't going to be a jog in the park. As regular readers of my column both know, I have completed a few half marathons, including all the excellent Maidenhead Half's, but when crossing the finishing line, I find the thought of another 13 miles a little daunting.

It's a challenge, not as difficult as the one my daughter faced, which I intend to rise to with a lot of training and the same determination she showed and together we will aim to 'beat' our challenges in 2016.

If you would like to sponsor me, go to <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/TerryAdlam> and all donations and tips on running 26 miles 385 yards would be greatly received.

A FAB IDEA - Published 18th June 2015

I was in Leicester at the weekend as a guest at 'Andercon', a convention celebrating the work of the late Gerry Anderson. For the uninitiated, and there can't be many, Gerry and his then wife Sylvia were the producers behind such cult TV programmes as Supercar, Fireball XL5, Stingray, Thunderbirds, Captain Scarlet, Joe 90 and Space 1999. Although the couple split in 81, Gerry remarried and continued to produce more programmes, including two that I had the pleasure of working on, Terrahawks and Dick Spanner.

Today, his son, Jamie, has taken on the role of keeping the legacy of his father's work alive, as well as developing new Anderson projects for future generations. By the enthusiasm and appreciation shown over the weekend, it's a legacy well worth persevering.

Which got me thinking, shouldn't there be a permanent tribute locally to celebrate this legacy, as most of Gerry's productions were made around this area.

Islet Park House, near Boulton's Lock, locations on the Slough Trading Estate, where 50 years ago the iconic Thunderbirds was made and both Pinewood and Bray Studios have played host to Gerry's remarkable television output. Even The King's Arms in Cookham once employed a waiter who was the inspiration for the voice of Lady Penelope's trusted Butler, 'Parker'.

So how about a plaque there or at one of the locations in Slough or if the rumours regarding turning Bray Studios into housing are true, a 'Gerry Anderson Road' or 'Tracy Island Avenue' could be a FAB idea.

REPETITIVE STRAIN - Published 16th April 2015

Is it just me, but with televisions congested with more channels than you can shake a limp Radio Times at, am I the only one who is fed up with the amount, and more annoyingly, regularity of repeats shown on our screens.

As funny as the likes of 'The Big Bang Theory', 'Family Guy', and 'The Simpsons' are, do they have to be on virtually every day, sometimes back-to-back and continually repeated, seemingly on the hour?

Do we need channels where Mrs Marples, Morse and the Midsummer Murder's team investigate and solve the same case again and again and again? I don't think a day goes past where you can't watch Doc Martin being medically morose somewhere in the listings. Talk about a repeat prescription.

If that wasn't enough, we now have 'Plus 1' channels which means in some cases you can watch a repeat of the programme you've just watched before its even ended!

Technology has bestowed upon us this abundance of channels but what is the point if most of them - no matter how they are packaged, be it 'Classic TV', 'More TV', 'Retro TV' or 'Brussel Sprouts TV' - have schedules crammed with repeats and re-runs.

If there aren't enough new shows to fill the channels, then it might be time to cut back on the amount of channels that have to be filled and get those who plan these sort of things to concentrate on having a schedule without repetition.

Or... is it just me?

LET IT SNOW - Published 19th February 2015

Okay, who's got it? Come on, own up. I know someone is hiding it and let's be honest, it's not an easy thing to hide. Everybody is expecting it, so what is the point of keeping it concealed? What am I talking about? This year's snow of course!

Apart from a very light and feeble dusting the other week, disappearing as quickly as it arrived, the promised yearly re-emergence of another ice age in our part of the country has been somewhat conspicuous by its absence.

Weather warnings or as they are now dramatically referred to as 'Weather Bombs' – as if the weather isn't as exciting enough already – set us preparing for the traditional inability to travel, educate and function normally for a few days in February.

Threats of 'white out' have seem to become 'write offs', and as if to add salt to the wound as opposed to the roads, we have been graced in our corner of Berkshire with an early spring of crisp sunny days.

Snow shovels, sledges and Artic clothing stand unpurchased in shops, garages and warehouses for the local mountaineers, as the sun shines on what looks like to be a flurry free February.

I know some of you will be breathing a sigh of relief that we've been passed over this year, but come on, admit it; we all love a bit of snow. Picturesque and problematic it may be, but without it, I personally feel cheated.

So come on, let it snow!

IT'S A CRACKER - Published 24th December 2014

To quote the words of a certain Neville Holder, 'So here it, Merry Christmas' and despite the stresses that can entail, I hope you're having fun.

Despite being the season of goodwill, there are people who work hard during the preceding months to enhance your festive frolics and their efforts are rarely celebrated and often belittled. So, please spare a thought for the unsung heroes of Christmas, the Christmas Cracker Joke writers.

Gems such as 'Why does Sherlock Holmes buy the Christmas Radio Times when he is alone over the festive season? So he can see 'What's on!'' and 'Why did the man cover himself in gelatine at Christmas? Because it's the season to be jelly.' need to be applauded, not groaned at.

Rewards for wordsmiths constructing classics along the lines of 'Where does Santa appear in concert? At the Oh Oh O2 Centre.' or 'What do you and Nigel Farage have in common after Christmas dinner? Ukip.' barely amount to nothing more than a snort of derision or a half-hearted smirk. Is that really in the Christmas spirit of things?

So come on, this year when you sit there with a slightly ripped paper hat set at a jaunty angle upon your head and that small piece of Christmas cheer in your hand, just think of the minutes of work that went into 'Guess what my favourite supermarket Christmas Carol is? 'Lidl Donkey'' and enjoy. Remember, Christmas is also a time for forgiving.

Merry Christmas to pun and all!

STAGING A COMEBACK - Published 30th October 2014

For the past seven years, I've been a volunteer theatre reviewer for your favourite local newspaper. I've seen and had my say on numerous productions, but this week it's all changed.

Instead of sitting in the audience watching, I will be returning to the stage, after quite a while, to tread the Theatre Royal Windsor's boards for the first time in The Theatre Academy's production of 'Hairspray- The Musical'.

It's certainly a case of poacher turn gamekeeper, and has reminded me first hand of the time, dedication and hard work that goes into creating a show like this. I only have a 'Blink-and-you-might-miss-me' role, but the rest of the company, made up of primarily very talented youngsters, have been working so diligently, belting out show-stopping songs, perfecting dazzling dance routines and acting their socks off, under the seemingly inexhaustible and contagious enthusiasm of director, Eddie Dredge and his creative production crew.

For me, it's a bit of a dream come true and 'Cross that off the bucket list' moment to be appearing in our most famous local theatre. A theatre we need to support and must not let close.

As you read this, the spectacular production will be 'wowing' audiences, but I'd like to take this opportunity to wish all involved, a belated 'Good Luck' and thank everybody at The Theatre Academy for allowing me to be both part of the show and such a friendly company.

And finally, for a change, it'll be me looking forward to the review.

OUT ON THE STREETS - Published 4th September 2014

It doesn't feel like 12 months ago I was proclaiming in this column that I was running in the third Pharmalink Maidenhead Half Marathon, but it was and here I am ready to do it again on Sunday morning in the fourth Pharmalink Maidenhead Half Marathon.

I'm looking forward to it and despite a slight leg injury I got from playing international football in Spain recently, (Okay, it was a kickabout with some other Dad's and kids on holiday in Menorca) I'm hoping for a PB of crossing the finishing line in an upright position.

I've plodded my way round the course every year since the inaugural race in 2011 and the enthusiastic and friendly organisers at Purple Patch Running always ensure that it improves with age, but the thing I enjoy most about this half marathon is having the support.

No, not that kind of support, madam, but the support of you who line the course, cheering us on, directing us and staffing the Water Stations.

I think this is one of the best-supported races around and I'd like to thank you all personally, as I amble around the course, but that might upset my schedule to finish before it gets dark. So can I take this opportunity to thank you all in anticipation for cheering the runners on, especially that puffing, grey-haired man in the canary yellow top with the number 619 on it, for that will be me and I'll need all the encouragement I can get.

A NIGHT OUT - Published 7th August 2014

As a regular theatre reviewer for the Advertiser, I was upset to hear that the future of the Theatre Royal in Windsor is under threat. The thought of this local world-renowned theatre facing a final curtain call is very worrying.

With no funding or grants, owner, Bill Kenwright's subsidy is allegedly being stretched to breaking point and the only thing that will save the show is an increase in ticket sales.

That means more people need to go to the Theatre Royal, and to encourage more people to attend, new potential theatregoers should be made aware of the enjoyment a night out at the theatre can bring. So here goes...

There is an atmosphere in a theatre, be it in Windsor or the West End, that you will not find sitting in front of a television or cinema screen. Theatre is live. Theatre is very much a case of 'What you see is what you get' and there is no need to wear special glasses to see it in 3D.

The restriction of the stage brings with it creativity and imagination. Performances are not a collection of best takes and clever editing, but a sharing of real-time acting skills and interaction between actors and audiences.

Going to the theatre is a unique event and thankfully, there are many opportunities to do so, with many professional and excellent amateur productions available locally. Let's not lose those opportunities, especially in the case of the Theatre Royal, Windsor, so book your seat today.

HIDDEN TREASURE - Published 12th June 2014

On the recent wet, dull, Spring Bank Holiday – are there any other sort – I discovered a hidden treasure within soggy strolling distance from home.

Though not exactly hidden, more unassumingly located, the History On Wheels Motor Museum in Eton Wick certainly brightened up a grey day. Although established in 1978 and opened to the public in 1980, it's only taken yours truly, 34 years to pay it a visit.

It had always been one of those places I thought I must have a look at, especially when signs announcing its presence would appear locally around Bank Holiday times, but for reasons unknown, I never got round to it.

Well I'm glad I finally rectified that oversight, as I did enjoy this collection of motors, militaria and memories put together by private collector, the late Tony Oliver and now overseen by his approachable and knowledgeable son, Peter.

Concentrating primarily, but not exclusively, on the era of the first and second World Wars, it was a fascinating look at military and civilian vehicles of the time, along with a myriad of memorabilia ranging from armed forces uniforms, local historical items of interest and reconstructions of family life during those dark days. There is also a display of Princess Diana collectables and a welcoming NAAFI for light refreshments.

I may be one of the few to take such a long time to discover this local gem, but it did get me wondering as to what other indigenous places of interest I've been ignoring.

GOOD MOANING - Published 10th April 2014

I fancy having a bit of a moan today; it's been that sort of couple of months since we last spoke. The only problem is I'm not sure what to focus my whinging on.

It could be opening times displayed on doors that do not corresponded with the actual opening of said doors.

Then again, ordering an early morning breakfast in a cafe only to be told that it's too early was a good one, as was standing for an hour in the cold having just run a Half Marathon waiting for a shuttle bus.

There was the appointment with a home improvement company I made for a survey and a quote, who never turned up and the alternative company, who when they did arrive, the special discounted price given over the phone, had doubled and was no longer special or discounted.

What about being followed by a car with a camera on its roof every morning on the school run, just in case I stop my car to drop my daughter off in the wrong place?

Long queues at the quick checkout at Asda, bar staff that ignore you, phones that won't charge, milk cartons that leak, pot holes the size of small principalities, politicians bickering, sand blowing in from the Sahara, stupid 'What are you?' Facebook surveys and 'Britain's Got Talent' is back on the television. I'm not a happy bunny.

I think I need cheering up, so I'm off to buy an England football kit... How much!!!

LOVE IS - Published 13th February 2014

Depending on when you're reading this, love is, or was all around us, with St Valentine's Day, a day that reminds me of a time, many silvery moons ago, when I was besotted by a beautiful girl who I was eager to impress on our first Valentine's Day.

The candlelit dinner was booked – why they cooked our dinner over a candle still baffles me, it took ages! - the card was suitable soppy, the champagne, the finest a fiver could buy and a packet of Cadbury buttons were ready to offer as tokens of my love. Then there was the pièce de résistance, the single red rose.

This epitome of the romantic gesture caught my eye as I filled up with petrol on the way home the night before. Languishing between the barbeque briquettes and cans of anti-freeze, I plucked this flower for my Valentine.

All I needed now was somewhere to conceal this delicate bloom until it was time to show my affection. Being a man, I hid it in... the airing cupboard!

Come the day, I presented the card and the champers, told of the romantic meal planned and then went to retrieve the gift that would say it all.

I'm not sure that withered stick of thorns and dark brown crusty petals I presented to my love said what I wanted it to say, but we are still together 26 years later, so it worked, even if on this occasion, love was in the air...ing cupboard.

PAY AND DISMAY - Published 19th December 2013

Regular readers know that I have always been full of praise for Dorney Lake. I've enjoyed using it as part of my weekly jogs and so proud of its Olympic heritage.

As a family, we've been using the site regularly since it first opened. We've had many an enjoyable walk around it. I taught my daughters to ride their first bikes, there, and now, in the case of my youngest daughter, train in some long distance running. It has been great.

Then recently the car parks sprouted pay and display machines.

Now, we don't live a million miles away, but it's quite a walk, which can sap the energy and enthusiasm levels by time we arrive, so driving there is easier, paying £2.50 to park, isn't.

For most, a car is prerequisite for a visit, and okay the charge for an occasional visit isn't too bad, but for regulars like us, it's an expense we can well do without, so our outings have been less frequent, along with, I imagine, quite a few other users.

I realise that places like this need an income to survive, but couldn't it come from those with bigger corporate pockets than the already budget conscious public.

What with Dorney Lake now joining the likes of Black Park and Burnham Beeches with their pay and dismay machines, I'm worried that there's not going to be anywhere locally to go and relax in the open air, where the only thing that is free... is the air.

COME OVER FROM THE DARK SIDE - Published 31st October 2013

I would like to dedicate this column to cyclists.

Not to all cyclists. Not to the casual user like myself or the long distance trekkers in their brightly coloured outfits. Not to the conscientious cyclists, who realise that 'The Highway Code' isn't a novel about Dick Turpin written by Dan Brown. Not to the cyclists who go off road, up mountains, down to the shops, know the difference between a pavement and a road and wear all the protective gear. No, not you, for this column is dedicated to the 'Numpties' who ride around in the dark with no lights!

What are you doing, you muppets! If you don't have any lights on your bike when the moon is out, you can't be seen! Driving is stressful enough, without the need for me to wear night-vision goggles, so that I can see you before you're sitting on my bonnet.

The clocks have only just gone back and I've already lost count of the amount of sudden encounters I've had with unlit bikes, ridden by cyclists dressed as if they were going on a commando raid. Isn't it obvious that black is not a good colour to wear when riding at night?

Okay, it might be a bit more sensible if bike manufactures produced cycles with lights fitted as standard, but until that bright idea is taken on, it's your responsibility to come over from the Dark Side, before it's too late. It's time to 'reflect' on your nocturnal cycling safety.

ON THE RUN AGAIN - Published 5th September 2013

Once again, it's time for me to pound the roads of Maidenhead and Cookham as the third Pharmalink Maidenhead Half Marathon takes place this Sunday morning.

Organised by those nice folk at Purple Patch Running, this race is building a good reputation amongst the jogging fraternity. Being quite flat, it's a great course for achieving a personal best for the distance. Something I'm aiming to do, with my personal target of finishing before it gets dark!

It's my third time taking part and apart from the lack of hills, one of the things I enjoy most, is the support we competitors get along the route.

With the opportunity for a lie-in and breakfast in bed, it's great to see so many of you forgoing one of life's little luxuries and coming out to help and cheer us on. It is much appreciated; especially around seven miles, when the course takes us back up Lower Cookham Road to Cookham and then back down Maidenhead Road for the second time. Repetitive routes can be gruelling both mentally and physically, so every bit of encouragement really helps.

If you happen to see me chugging along – I'm number 619 – please feel free to give me a wave and a cheer and although I may not look happy – what runner does – I will be smiling inside and spurred on by your support.

So to all the organisers, marshals, drink-station helpers and supportive spectators giving up your Sunday morning, may I say in anticipation, 'Many Thanks!'

HIDDEN TALENT - Published 4th July 2013

Recently I went to The Hobgoblin pub in the High Street, for an open mic night, not as a performer I hasten to add, but as part of a very appreciative audience.

Professionally organised by Carly Kenny, a passionate and enthusiastic organiser, promoter, and supporter of the Arts in Maidenhead, on every first Wednesday of the month she offers performers and bands, the chance to showcase their acoustic talents, with every fourth Friday of the month being a 'Best of' evening.

It was on one of these aptly titled evenings that I attended and was blown away by the talent on show. An eclectic mix of styles and sounds filled this amazingly little known, but thankfully growing in reputation, venue.

Able assisted at the mixing desk by Dad, Mac, Carly's acoustic nights are not just for singers and bands without live drum kits, but any performers looking for the chance to shine, be them comedians, poets or magicians.

As a testament to her unwavering and tireless commitment to promoting all types of music, Carly also organises metal/punk/rock nights for full bands.

Since meeting the Kenny's, I've become more aware of the burgeoning Maidenhead music and arts scene and with the recent Arts in the Street and the forthcoming Maidenhead Festival at the end of July, both of which Carly has been intrinsically involved in, it appears to be exciting times for musicians and performers in the area.

Those interested in being part of this excitement can contact Carly at Carly@maidenheadlive.com

THE MYTH OF OCCUPATIONS - Published 9th April 2013

There are myths that exist around certain occupations, such as showbiz is all glamour and the life of a writer is a rose-covered cottage idyll. Job descriptions often created by people who have never been on stage or who have only written a shopping list.

The biggest misplaced myth involves teachers. Having more holidays than a travel brochure and always home in time to watch 'Countdown' are just some accusations.

As the husband of a teacher, I have first-hand experience of the profession and therefore a qualified myth-buster. She and her colleagues work incredible hard. The average school bell may ring at 9am and 3:30pm, but that's only part of a teacher's working day, which in reality starts with the 6am bedside alarm and finishes just before 'Newsnight', with most weekend and holidays rarely work free.

So the recent proposed extension of working hours and reduction of holidays seems ludicrous and, again, seems to be coming from someone who hasn't returned to school since their 'Leavers' disco.

Extending the school day may provide some parents with welcomed free childcare but it will bite into the already little time teachers have to prepare and assess. Depleting holidays will reduce time to plan for forthcoming terms and importantly, the time spent with loved ones without intrusive marking and lesson plans.

I know there are other occupations that require long hours and dedication, but teachers seem to attract a lot of unfounded criticism, so come on Westminster, give them a bit of break.

ON THE ROAD TO CHARITY - Published 15th March 2013

This Sunday I'll be running The Reading Half Marathon. It's not my first half marathon and if my body holds out, not my last, but it's one of the rare occasions that I'm running to raise money.

I tend not to seek sponsorship because I participate in a few races a year and do not expect people's generosity to cater for every event. However, the reason for the change is that The Molly Watt Trust is a Maidenhead based trust raising money and awareness for sufferers of Usher Syndrome, a leading cause of deafblindness.

I got to know Molly, a young sufferer, and her family over post Saturday morning shopping coffees at our local Sainsbury's in Taplow and learnt about the Trust and projects they have planned.

One project that struck a chord with me, being a writer, was "Access to Reading" based on the discovery that Kindles are excellent for sufferers who are unable to read normal books or magazines. The Trust is seeking funds to buy and supply these electronic readers, and that's where I come hobbling in, hoping that my sweaty exertions will result in some much needed Kindles.

So, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank those who have already dug deep and say that if you would like to donate or find out more about the Trust, log on to www.mollywatt.com.

Finally, good luck to any other readers taking part on Sunday and I hope you'll have a great run, I know I will.

TAKING THE PLUNGE - Published 10th January 2013

It's confession time. I'm 53 and I can't swim.

I say 'can't', I can do a form of 'Doggy Paddle' that is more splash than substance which has been known to send watching Jack Russells into fits of hysterical laughter. There have also been times when armed with mask, snorkel, armbands, lifejacket, rubber ring and a lilo, I've been known go all Jacques Cousteau in the shallow end of a paddling pool, but any resemblance between my attempts at not drowning and swimming are purely laughable.

So awash with New Year resolutions enthusiasm and fed up of always sitting by the pool or on the beach on holidays, I have signed up for swimming lessons.

Over the next twelve weeks, I am going to try to rid my body of it submarine tendencies and learn to swim like a human and not like a house brick. I'll be honest and say that I'm nervous, as water and me have never really got on, especially when mixed with soap or whisky, but I think it's time I took the plunge.

By the time we talk again, I shall be nearing the end of the course and I hope to be giving Michael Phelps a run for his money and astounding my instructor with my aquatic excellence. Then again, I'd be happy to be swimming in a style that's more 'confident' than 'canine'.

It's certainly a case of 'sink or swim', so wish me, and my instructor, luck...We're going to need it.

BONDING WITH BOND - Published 1st November 2012

The obsession started when I was seven and I saw a volcano... in Buckinghamshire.

The volcano, made of scaffolding and plaster, loomed large over the back-lot of Pinewood Studios and was a fantastic set piece for the fifth James Bond film 'You Only Live Twice'. It was then that 007 entered my world.

Forty six years later, I'm driving home from the Maidenhead Odeon, my obsession boosted by the excellent 'Skyfall', the Ford Mondeo now the Aston Martin DB5 and the red lights on the Bath Road, my evil nemesis, and I'm still excited by all things 007.

At an age when the only Bonds I should be thinking about are savings and pensions, Bond is still very much part of my life. We had the love theme from 'On Her Majesty's Secret Service' played at our wedding and as I write this, I'm surrounded by my fixation in many forms. Do I need a Doctor, No!

Like my family, but far less important, obviously, Bond has always been there for me. Momentarily escapism from the rigours of growing up, a distraction during the hard times and an added enjoyment to the good.

Double-O Seven is a part of the person I am, like a favourite football team, band or hobby is to others and as the world celebrates fifty years of Bond on film, I would like to add my congratulations and to say publicly, 'Thank you Mr Bond, James Bond, life wouldn't have been the same without you.'

RUNNING ON EMPATHY - Published 27th September 2012

Last week a fellow columnist offered his eloquent thoughts on the attraction of road-running. The attraction being that in his eyes, there is no attraction. Now each to their own, I feel the same about cricket, but as runner, I felt a response was in order.

Far from numbing the brain, the legs maybe, I find running a very relaxing past time. Yes, 'relaxing'. Particularly after a stressful week, I really enjoy setting off for a pleasant hour or so traversing the local highway and byways. Stress is sweated out and problems are pounded away and the little grey cells, awash with endorphins and my favourite tunes giving it large in my ears via the aforementioned Ipod, switch into high creative mode. In fact, many of my columns have been results of seeds sown and cogitated over the miles covered.

I agree that cycling and walking is as beneficial, but canoeing and swimming to an ashamed non-swimmer like me isn't an option. I'm also aware of the risks and yes, the joints do have their work cut out, but the heart and soul certainly enjoys the workout and I feel so much better for it, both physically and mentally.

So, thank you my esteemed colleague, I did enjoy the excellent Maidenhead Half Marathon and have no plans to stop running yet as I've set myself a goal to be still jogging along on my 80th birthday and as you say I'd like to think that I might just surprise myself.

OLYMPIC AFTERMATH - Published 23rd August 2012

Well I personally thought that the Olympics were a bit of a failure, especially locally. My excitement was high but descended into a despond of deep disappointment, as expectations were never realised.

Where was the disruption to our daily lives that we were promised? Where were the eagerly anticipated traffic clogged roads? What happened to the expected collapse of the borough's infrastructure and the loss to local businesses?

What was the point of my carefully thought out plans B, C and D on getting to the Sainsbury's in Taplow avoiding the masses that were to descend on Dorney? What am I going to do with two weeks' worth of frozen ready meals I'd stockpiled in fear of not being able to leave my home?

During the whole event, the longest queue I stood in was at the ten items or less aisle at the aforementioned supermarket, to which I drove along a Bath Road so devoid of cars that I thought it had been pedestrianised. Oh, where was the mayhem?

Even when the family and I went to Eton Dorney on 'Super Saturday', trepidation and angst were replaced by relaxed ease as we took our place at the venue as smoothly as Team GB skimmed along the water to victory.

What was going on? We were told to expected chaos, congestion and confusion and what did we get? We got an excellently organised and spectacularly successful Olympics that was the envy of the world and 65 medals!

What went wrong?

OLYMPIC PRIDE - Published 26th July 2012

There's a saying that people when reaching a certain age, yours truly included, use with growing frequency and that is 'I remember when this was all fields.' Well, in the case of The Eton Dorney Rowing Lake, I do.

Generally, the statement is used to bemoan the development of an unspoilt landscape, but for me Dorney Lake is as far removed from a 'blot' as can be. As a regular route for my regular jogs for many years, I have always thought of it as a wonderful addition to our local environment and that was even before it was chosen as a prestigious Olympic venue.

Although my route within the site has been understandably restricted recently, I still get an enormous sense of pride when I run along the adjacent footpath and see the preparations for its Olympic participation taking place.

To have part of the Olympics on our doorstep is so exciting and I think we should all be proud of our local venue and face all the inevitable, but once in a lifetime, disruptions with a sense of proportion and a smile and show the world what brilliant hosts we can be.

So on the eve of the London 2012 Olympics, I'd like to wish management and staff, stewards and volunteers and those athletes involved with 'our' Dorney Lake all the very best over the next month. I'm sure all your hard work and dedication will ensure our local area a place in Olympic history. Go Team GB!

THERE WE GO, THERE WE GO, THERE WE GO! - Published 28th June 2012

Regular readers of my column, - both of you – will know that I'm a footy fan and a keen England supporter. I've smiled in victory and cried in defeat, but never given up hope.

This constant optimism is part of being an England supporter, as is the shadow of 1966. A proud but constant reminder of the last time England played in a competitive final.

I did think that when I was writing this column on Sunday morning that my optimism would finally be rewarded. At that time, I believed we could beat the Italians that evening, trounce the Germans in Thursday's semis, and defeat Spain in the final on Sunday. I believed that this would be our year and a wonderful addition to the UK's summer of sport?

Alas, it wasn't to be and a hasty rewrite was needed as England once again went out on penalties and my optimism took another drubbing.

What is it with England and this aversion to finals? Why can't we win when it matters? The obvious answer is that we're just not good enough, but then again, is it the fault of us loyal supporters on the terraces, down the pubs and in our St Georges flag covered homes? Does our passion and expectations far exceed the potential of the team? Are we just expecting too much? Most likely, but what I do know is that this 'not giving up hope' and 'optimism' lark is getting harder with each passing year of hurt.

WHAT'S THE POINTS - Published 31st May 2012

I thought Engelbert Humperdink scored really well last Saturday night ... mind you, I was playing scrabble at the time. In fact, I got more points on my Nectar Card when I bought a pint of milk the other day, than he did at Eurovision 2012.

Saying that, I don't think lack of huit, dix and douze points was entirely the reason that The Big E got the big heave-O. Okay, so the song was instantly forgettable and his performance had more Sanatogen than sparkle, but who today can whistle the tune to the winning Swedish dirge or have learnt the dance steps of the shuffling Russian grannies?

Like Europe, Eurovision has changed.

Back in the days when Cliff was congratulating everyone, Abba were singing about a railway station in London and 'Euro' was something you did in a rowing boat, here was a chance for Europe to get together and laugh at each others and Norway's musical prowess. Now it has nothing to do with musical talent, which is lucky considering some of this year's tuneless troubadours, but more to do with politics, favouritism and tactical voting, with a song chucked in to ease the boredom.

Surely, it's time the UK knocked Eurovision on the head and withdraws from participating. I mean, if we can make a stand over the single currency, pulling out of what is becoming an annual humiliation has to be a doddle. So, in the words of Engel 'Please release me, let me go...'

JUST NOT THE TICKET - Published 3rd May 2012

Recently I received an overdue unpaid parking ticket fine for an offence I didn't know I had even committed.

Apparently, I'd parked my car where I shouldn't have and, as the photo on the official council paperwork showed, I had been issued with a parking ticket. It was certainly there in the photo, but not on my car when I returned to it. There was little chance I could have missed it as I drove off, as according to the photographic evidence, it was stuck slap bang in the middle of my rear window.

After informing the council that the ticket was not where they said it was, they sent another evidential document with another photo showing a second ticket on the front windscreen. Now that one I would have definitely noticed because I would have had to peer around it to drive safely.

Unfortunately, the 'Camera-Never-Lies' theory overruled my honest remonstrations of not knowingly been aware that I had committed a parking violation and along with the 'Not-Having-A-Leg-To-Stand-On' dictum, the fine was paid and what ever happened to the two tickets remains a mystery.

It this is by chance a new urban prank where tickets are removed from vehicles by those who are hard of thinking, racking up overdue fines for the unsuspecting drivers, then I find it as funny as receiving a ticket in the first place.

Being a motorist is hard and frustrating enough these days without having to contend with an annoying irritation such as this.

BUYING PANIC - Published 5th April 2012

Last week I spent a lot of time searching and enquiring, but do you think I could find any of this 'Panic' people were buying?

I knew it was popular as everybody was talking about and wanting it, but I'll be honest, and I apologise for my lack of knowledge, I had no idea what this 'Panic' was. Subsequently, not wanting to be the only person in my street without any, I set off in search of this new 'must have'.

Unfortunately I had to keep my somewhat fruitless mission to within walking distance as such was the attractiveness of this elusive commodity, recommended by the top people in our government no less, consumerism hysteria had arrived.

So enticing was the lure that people were filling up their cars with as much fuel as they could, to ensure that their quest for 'Panic' was not hampered in any way.

I thought about queuing for petrol for a couple hours to ensure my 'Panic' pursuit was not short lived, but surely, that was just wasting time. How much of this 'Panic' was there to go around? How long before like the first class stamps in the Post Office, the pasties in Greggs and the common sense of some people, would it all be gone?

A week later and I'm still looking, but if the petrol stations are anything to go by I think I'm too late, No one seems that bothered in buying 'Panic' anymore and another fad bites the dust.

RUN RABBIT RUN - Published 8th March 2012

Did any of you see me running in the Oaken Grove Park area of Maidenhead last Sunday morning? You couldn't miss me; I was soaking wet and dressed as a rabbit!

No, this wasn't a new 'Hare-brained' scheme of mine to improve my running style but the inaugural Maidenhead Bunny Fun Run. Very well organised by the Rotary Club of Maidenhead Thames, this charity 5K run had my youngest daughter and I pounding the rain-lashed streets for a little over 30 minutes, along with many other bobbing bob-tails.

Despite the inclement weather, spirits were high, and support, understandably limited, was enthusiastic. The only real damp squib of the morning, were the few Sunday drivers who appeared not to understand the meaning of the words 'Fun', 'Slow' and 'Stop'.

Braving both disagreeable weather conditions and said drivers, the Marshals did their best to ensure the safety of us bright eyes, bushy tailed joggers and help minimise the disruption. However, for some, this interruption to their obviously very busy Sunday schedule was just not on. I saw at least two motorists complaining quite animatedly about the delay and heard from one Marshal about their leap to safety to avoid an impatient motorist.

As a driver myself I'm aware of the frustration that driving brings, but surely stopping for a few minutes to let some runners dressed as soggy bunnies pass isn't one of them. I'll even go as far as saying, is it really worth getting in to a 'Rabbit' stew about!

THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SNOW BUSINESS- Published 9th February 2012

There appears to be a new phenomenon sweeping the country as I write. It's making headlines in newspapers, on TV, radio and the Internet. It's out gossiping what's happening in the soaps and what John and Gregg are stuffing their faces with on 'Masterchef'.

It's causing reactions as diverse as panic and excitement. Its impending arrival has people out in the streets full of expectation and devoid of preparation.

Is it the Olympics? Oh, if only it was that exciting. No, the reason for this misplaced hysteria is for something called 'Snow'.

Apparently, 'Snow' is a metrological occurrence caused by a mixture of extratropical cyclones, warm fronts and ice particles, but here's the revelation, it's quite common this time of year!

Now that got me thinking and do you know what, I think we did have some 'Snow' last year, and if I recollect, the year before that and before that and before...

It's snow folks! It comes every year, so why all the consternation and warnings? Surely, we know what to do by now when it snows? Apparently not. Driving conditions remain treacherous, trains and planes are motionless and schools appear to close as soon as the first flake hits the playground.

What is it with this country that a few inches of compact ice crystals can bring it to its knees? Have we not learned anything from past experiences? Why can't we cope? Excuse me while I go outside and build a snowman and think about it.

SMILE WITH A SERVICE - Published 12th January 2012

The words 'Customer' and 'Service' have never sat together well. Television shows and tenacious presenter's careers have been made on the weaknesses of lacklustre after-sales interaction. Therefore, it'll come as a revelation to tell of a recent experience I had regarding 'Customer Service', where they did exactly what it said on the tin.

Over Christmas, my daughter's phone stopped working, and those with teenagers will know that is tantamount to cutting off all forms of communication with the outside world, so for the sanity of us both, a hasty repair was needed.

As the phone was under warranty I phoned the number of no return, better known as the 'Customer Service Hotline,' and was ready for the pre-recorded message informing me that all operators were on their hols until January and could I leave my message with their message.

So imagine my surprise when I spoke to a real person who actually gave the impression that they wanted to help. I told them of my plight and within minutes, arrangements were made to have a replacement phone couriered to my door the next morning before 10am and what was more surprising, that's exactly what happened.

No excuses about inabilities to function between Christmas and the New Year. No delivery delays, no problems, just 'Customer Service'. I won't say who the company was who gave me hope that all is not lost in our supposedly waning society but let's just say that with that standard of service, their future looks bright.

WHERE DID THAT YEAR GO? - Published 8th December 2011

They say - whoever 'They' are – I'm not sure, but they do seem to have an opinion on everything - They say that the older you get, the faster the years seem to pass. Well I agree with them – 'Them' being 'They' of course.

Now, I'm not 'over the hill', although I can see the brow, but this year has passed in a supersonic blur. I know the days get shorter in winter, but it feels that the lazy summer days haven't been hanging around either.

To use a well-worn phrase bandied around this time of year, no, not 'Hide the Gin, Gran's coming for Christmas', but one uttered with regularity as this month ebbs away, 'Where did that year go!'

It doesn't feel like twelve months ago that I was penning January's column and, as it works out now, lying about all the decorating I was going to do in Adlam Towers this year.

Since then I've berated traffic lights, On-line ticket sales, Justin Bieber, Tesco and metal thieves. I've pondered over the power of suggestion, social networking and the football season and extolled the success of Maidenhead's first Half Marathon. All great fun, but where did the time go?

Mind you, 'They' also say that time flies when you're enjoying yourself, so that must be why this past year as your friendly columnist has appeared to have been in fast – forward.

Based on that theory, may I be the first to wish you a very Merry Christmas... 2012!

UP ON THE ROOF- Published 10th November 2011

An old joke goes 'At the wedding, the groom's family sat on the right, while the bride's family were up on the church roof nicking the lead.' Not hilarious, and in respect of the recent metal thefts in our area, not that funny at all.

I was amazed to read recently that in Maidenhead and Windsor alone, this form of crime has risen by 75% in the last year. Local churches, businesses and the Heritage Centre have all been recent victims of this plundering and it appears that these new type of Heavy Metal fans are not just targeting commercial properties, but homes and even statues.

Just over a year ago the bronze hippos were stolen from North Town Moor and last month the appalling theft and destruction of the Altwood schoolboys memorial from Ray Mill Island, showed the depths to which these abhorrent would-be-chemists will sink to make gold from others loss.

So are these metals such valuable assets? I'm not aware there's a shortage that necessitates this form of blatant vandalism, but it's been reported as the fastest growing crime in the UK.

It's not going to be easy stopping thieves who are happy to risk their lives on the slippery roof of a church, at night, to steal some lead flashing, but something needs to be done. I'm not sure as to the worth of these metals, but I'm guessing it's less than the victim's replacement and repair costs and like my opening joke, that's no laughing matter.

JUST THE TICKET - Published 13th October 2011

One Direction, a manufactured boy band, sounding exactly like any other manufactured boy band, are the current flavour of the month with my two young daughters, and tickets to their shows were to be released on the first of this month at 10am.

Come the Saturday, we manned the Internet ready to purchase the tickets. 10am came, there was a flurry of excited fingers over the keyboard, and in less than ten seconds, the site informed us that all the tickets had been sold and I had two very disappointed girls to console.

Unless there were only a dozen tickets available, I cannot not believe that all the tickets could go that rapidly. The same happened last weekend when some extra dates were announced and before we'd even typed in our request, the tickets had gone.

So can someone tell me who are buying these tickets so quickly? If my daughter's experience is anything to go by, it's not the fans. I have my ideas that are substantiated when looking on other tickets sites, and e-bay, and seeing some tickets going for an incredible £400. It's so wrong.

I would also like to know about the technology that allows thousands of purchases to be made in such an infinitesimal short time? Unless it involves some form of time travel, I cannot fathom how it is possible.

If anyone could enlighten me as to how this is done, it would be much appreciated, In fact it would be just the ticket.

RUNNING COMMENTARY - Published 15th September 2011

Warning, this column contains a high content of positivity and no added discontent.

Well I did it, completed the first Maidenhead Half Marathon in a not to shameful time. Despite the early start, anything before 9:30am on a Sunday is early for me, the torrential rain and having to run the 13.1 miles, I must say what an enjoyable experience it was.

Congratulations must go to Purple Patch Running for organising the event and finding the loudest starting cannon I have ever heard, I've never seen so many runners all jump at once, but also to you, the people of Maidenhead, for your tremendous support.

You were everywhere, from the start outside the Town Hall to the backwaters of Bray, alongside the Thames to Cookham and through rain lashed Furze Platt and the final run for home down the High Street. Clapping, cheering, offering jelly babies and in one case, a freshly barbequed, but slightly damp hot dog, the support we received as we strode and squelched around your streets was excellent.

As a local I was impressed, so I can only imagine what visiting runners and supporters thought of the turn out, but I'm sure they were equally overwhelmed. So well done to all of you who took the time to encourage us on and show how you can get behind an event like this and show that despite a somewhat ailing profile, Maidenhead isn't out of the race yet.

Thank you and see you all again next year.

ALL KICKING OFF - Published 25th August 2011

Well here we go again. Can't you just feel that tingle of excitement and the sense of expectation coursing through your body? Yes, the football season is back.

If you're lacking in any of these emotions, then you're probably not a lover of the beautiful game - I believe there's a couple of you - so it would be for the best if you abandoned this column now. I won't be offended, but this one is for all the football supporters out there, for whom this time of year, Saturdays become important again.

I wouldn't call myself a football fanatic, most of my cheering and berating is done from the armchair rather than the terraces, but I still get that welling up of expectation and hope when the season starts.

In these first few weeks and months, it's anybody's game and the campaign for league supremacy is at most interesting and May is a long way off.

No matter what team you support, league or local, the season is like the return of a good friend. Refreshed from a summer's break and ready to accompany you through the winter and spring months on a road that has still the possibility of glory.

I have it on good authority that it promises to be a very interesting season with forgone championship conclusions of past seasons less definite. So to all you footy fans, enjoy and to those of you who bemoan this annual sporting arrival, but still read on, you were warned.

THE ATTACK OF THE SUPERMARKETS - Published 21st July 2011

Now, I'm not one for throwing his toys out of his trolley, but, come on, do we really need another oversized supermarket in this area?

Yes, I have the right hump regarding the news that The Bishop Centre on the Bath Road, soon to be renamed 'Supermarket Avenue', is set to be replaced by Tesco. Why?

Haven't those who allow this retail rash to spread, noticed the large, soon to be larger, Sainsbury down the road? In fact, throw a can of beans hard enough in any direction from the A4 and you're bound to hit another Sainsbury's or a Waitrose, Adsa, Lidl's and of course the ubiquitous Tesco. It's supermarket saturation.

I'm not that naïve to think we don't need supermarkets. Of course we do, where else would I spend my Saturday mornings, but why so many so close together?

Were Taplow residents actually asked if they wanted this grocery giant stomping around their area, crushing local independent shops underfoot and causing gridlock on a major road not renowned for its ease of flow? Of course not, it's not about communities, it's about exploiting consumerism.

This attack of the supermarkets has got to be stopped before they take-over every vacant building in the land.

If you're as concerned as I am about this invasion, speak up. In the case of the on-going 'Battle of the Bishop Centre' there's a Facebook group called 'Say No To Tesco In Taplow' who are eager for your support and remember 'Every little helps.'

RUNNING DOWN MAIDENHEAD - Published 9th June 2011

As a regular pounder of the local streets, byways and paths, I'm looking forward to participating in the inaugural Pharmalink 2011 Maidenhead Half Marathon in September.

With the amount of flak that the area has come under from the 'Let's bury Maidenhead' brigade, it's great to see a new opportunity to raise the profile and bring back some smiles to the town.

I'm not ignoring the fact that the town isn't as it once was, but what town is? No matter what the spin-doctors tell us, we're still in recession and it's not a pretty sight wherever you look.

I'm not saying that a thousand plus sweaty runners, striding, or in my case plodding and wheezing, around the 13 mile course, is going to be attractive. Nor am I suggesting that the empty retail units in the High Street will suddenly become sports shops because of the event, but I am saying is that it's going to be something positive in this current climate of negativity... if we let it.

That's why I'm asking those out there itching to write in complaining about it being a waste of time and finances and moan about 'the inconveniences and parking problems' ... please don't. It's a couple of hours on a Sunday morning and the chance to show visiting runners and spectators, that there is still life in this supposed ghost town.

So come on, instead of running down Maidenhead, let's run around Maidenhead and get this town back in the race.

WASTE OF TIME? - Published 12th May 2011

In January, after much haranguing from my daughters, I joined Facebook and Twitter. I had resisted it as much as I could as I couldn't see the point. I'm like that; I avoid anything new and decree it as a fad and refuse to be impressed by its popularity. Mobile phones, Sat-Navs and Justin Bieber concerts have all been belittled by my rebellious streak. It's a sense of defiance that can last for days, even hours, before I succumbed to power of persuasion.

Well five months have passed since I succumbed and I'm a convert to social networking. It's the best waste of time I've found since I stopped playing golf.

I'm now in contact with those people that I promised I would call or write to, but never did and 'Tweeting' like an over excited budgie to like-minded 'Tweeters' I'm never likely to meet.

For me the appeal is the triviality of the majority of 'Posts' and 'Tweets'. In most cases it's just chatting. There may be the occasional debate, but it's mostly scripted snippets of other people lives as and when it happens. It's every day events that don't warrant a phone call or a letter. It's a fascinating and time consuming insight into the way we live today.

I've probably arrived a bit late to this particular party and guess most of you are already 'Friends' and 'Followers', but to those of you yet to arrive, give it a go, you've got nothing to lose but time.

IT'S ALL IN THE MIND - Published 14th April 2011

I saw Derren Brown's new stage show last weekend and as much as I would like to tell you in detail the amazing psychic prestidigitations he performed, I can't, owing to the fact that the man himself asked us not to reveal what we had witnessed for fear of spoiling it for future audiences. What I can say though is that what I saw was pretty amazing.

Now I'm old and sceptical enough to realise that there is no such thing as magic. I know its all sleight of hand, misdirection, auto suggestion and smoke and mirrors, but I was still impressed by Mr Brown's ability to seemingly read random members of the audience's minds by just chatting, watching and listening.

This got me pondering on just how much we give away about ourselves without actually knowing about it. It appears that anything we do from the way we stand to the way we speak to the way we move can reveal more about ourselves than we intend. Actions it appears are indeed louder than words.

As entertainment, it's great fun, but Derren Brown can't be the only one with the 'power' and surely this ability to manipulate, influence and reveal could be put to more serious use in the areas of, for example, criminal investigation and medical diagnosis?

Perhaps it already is? Then perhaps it's not, because it's all a clever trick to fool and impress the susceptible like me. I'm not sure, what do you think I think?

A DAD'S GOTTA DO WHAT A DAD'S GOTTA DO - Published 17th March 2011

Came closer, because this is something I don't want everyone to know about and I'm counting on your discretion in this matter. I had to go to a concert this week, a Justin Bieber concert. All right, stop laughing at the back. As the responsible parent was otherwise engaged, it fell to me to take two very, very excited young daughters to the O2 for their first pop concert and to see this flavour of the week Canadian teeny-booper.

Now I've been to a few concerts, but never one of this ilk. To use the common vernacular, O.M.G! - That's 'Oh my God!' for those of you 'Not down with the kids' - the noise! Thousands of mostly schoolgirls – collectively known as 'Bielebers'- screaming hysterically at a pitch so high that it cleared the wax out of my ears and had some dogs in that part of east London howling for submission. It had to be the shrillest concert I've ever attended.

As I sat there, most dragged along Dads just sat there, I realised that this was another rite of passage that parents have to go through, like that first school day, that first bike ride and now the first concert. There's more firsts to come I know, but despite my ears taking a pounding, I have to admit that I was enjoying the evening. Not so much master Bieber's performance, but seeing my girls having so much fun, being there with them and above all, being their Dad.

DRIVING ME MAD - Published 17th February 2011

I'm not a fan of cars. I don't watch Top Gear and if you were to ask me what sort of car I drive, I'd say, 'A silver one.' To me a car is just a convenient way of getting from A to B. Unlike a fellow columnist, I have no emotional attachment to my car and it hasn't a name, apart from the unprintable ones I call it when it fails to function correctly.

Driving holds no pleasure for me either. In fact, I can't see how traffic jams, road-works, speed-cameras, congestion zones, petrol prices, motorway service stations, other motorists and the M25 can bring pleasure to anyone.

For me the worst thing about driving is traffic lights. I hate traffic lights. Why? Because traffic lights hate me and as we seem to have more traffic lights in our area than streetlights, that's a lot of hate being exchanged.

I only have to get within metres of these three-eyed monsters and we both see red. I know they're there to control traffic flow, but that appears to be for the benefit of other drivers, not me. For me, traffic lights' sole raison d'être is to slow me down and wind me up, especially when I'm in a hurry. I can't remember the last time I passed a traffic light on green. Oh yes I can, it was January, but I'm not sure which year.

Does anybody else suffer from these irritating illuminations, or is it really just me they hate?

PLANNING AHEAD - Published 20th January 2011

Isn't January a busy month? Having just got over the preparation and panic of the festive season, here I am, with a mixture of enthusiasm and dread, planning ahead the coming year.

First up are the resolutions, what to give up, what to start and what to change. I'm giving up chocolate for a year, so expect to see a fall in Mars' and Cadbury's annual profits. I'm also not joining a gym.

This also tends to be the time of year when I clean up my computer. Deciding what files to keep and back-up and what folders to dispatch to the recycling bin, can be a bit of a palaver for someone as technically dim-witted as me.

Planning and booking the summer hols is a much more pleasurable diversion and is something I leave to my wife, as she is so good at it. That's not to say that I don't contribute to proceedings. I always agree to go wherever she suggests. The only downside of this particular task is that August seems so far, far away.

Then there is the bane of my life, decorating. The plans we have for sprucing up Adlam Towers are frightening. Unlike the confectionary business, the likes of B&Q and Homebase should be rubbing their hands with glee at my anticipated expenditure.

At least at the moment it is just planning, the actual work will begin next month... That is unless I can think of something less tedious to plan. Quick, any ideas?

SIMPLY HAVING A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS TIME? - Published 23rd Dec 2011

Roy Wood and Wizzard may wish it was Christmas every day and Sir Paul McCartney may be simply having a wonderful Christmas time, but please spare a thought for those in the retail trade who have to endure these constant reminders.

From the moment their shop opens till it closes hours later, these poor unfortunates are expected to go about their business, full of seasonal spirit, while their ears are bombarded with repeated plays of the festive warblings of Slade, Shakin' Stevens, Cliff and Band Aid.

Musical tastes aside, there's nothing wrong with these tunes, but relentless exposure to the likes of 'Walking in a Winter Wonderland' and 'Frosty The Snowman' must be detrimental to the health and well-being of the average shop worker.

I know of one store manager who suffers from a condition known as 'Festive Tinnitus' which is a constant ringing of sleigh bells in the ears.

I'm one of the lucky ones, I only hear snippets of John and Yoko telling me this is Christmas and Jona Lewie stopping the cavalry, as I flit from shop to shop, but once again please give a thought to the shop assistant who is about to hear what George Michael did last Christmas for the umpteenth time.

So on behalf of all the shoppers in our area, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the brave and gallant traders who suffer while we spend and wish them all a very Merry Christmas and a fairly peaceful New Year.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DREAD - Published 28th October 2010

It's not far from that night when we're all encouraged, especially our younger ones, to celebrate the weird and darker side of human nature. No, I'm not talking about the next round of The X Factor – although some of those wannabes do scare me – I'm talking about Halloween.

When I was younger Halloween passed with the minimum of fuss. 'Trick or Treat' happened in American movies and the only pumpkin you saw was in the 'Cinderella' Christmas panto. These days it's a big event and not far short of becoming a national holiday.

I don't dislike Halloween. Seeing parents and children wandering the streets dressed as monsters and chainsaw wielding serial killers asking strangers for sweets, appeals to the quizzical streak in me, but what I do find horrifying is the commercial exploitation of this eerie evening.

Almost every shop I've gone into over the last few weeks has been terrifyingly themed, especially some of the bigger supermarkets. Frightening fancy dress, diabolical decorations and revolting rubbish have been luring us hapless victims – better known as parents – in to parting with money we'd hope would be available for Christmas.

As I said, I'm all for a bit of 'apple-bobbing' and watching a scary film on the night, but do we really need to spend so much on scaring people? Aren't the forthcoming spending cuts scary enough or like the Dad I once saw walking with his young child dressed as an axe murderer, have we all gone a little bit mad?

COMPUTER DATING - Published 30th September 2010

My computer died last week. No amount of switching it off and on could revive the old girl. She had ceased to be and now rests in PC.

For the technically adroit amongst you, unlike me, (I think a flash drive is a ride in an Aston Martin) her hard-drive had failed and wasn't able to boot something or other.

Thankfully, my limited computer technology 'know-how' did include the importance of backing-up work and I have become something of a Mr Back-Up Man. So paranoid of facing a sudden fatality such as this, I even have back-ups of back-ups. So I may have lost a companion, but her memory lives on.

After a respectable period of mourning, I set about seeking a replacement. I found my ideal companion online. She was younger, faster, more powerful and although a bit on the expensive side, would be all I needed in a computer.

I was guaranteed her arrival would be swift and it wasn't long before the day arrived that we were to meet for the first time. I had booked the day off of work and anticipation was high. She didn't arrive. Profuse apologise from the high profile supplier, but she was still lounging in a dispatch bay in Poland.

Apparently there was a computer error in the ordering system, which doesn't bode well for the forthcoming relationship. Meanwhile I flirt with a borrowed laptop, but it's not the same as having a computer to call your own, is it?

SUMMER SOUNDS - Published 2nd September 2010

I'm writing this lounging by the hotel pool on a sweltering Spanish Sunday morning, inches from a cool drink and a splash away from my family as they frolic in the sun speckled water.

Like the inflatables that bob about on its shiny surface, the pool is full of British families of different shapes and sizes enjoying their summer break.

Around the pool, mums' soak up the sun and the latest bestseller, Dads' check the papers for yesterday football results and the kids devise ways to jump into the water causing the biggest splash, soaking the said newspapers and paperbacks.

From the terrace bar an eclectic mix of pop music accompanies these sounds of summer fun. Tunes I would not normally listen to become, after repeated plays, quite enjoyable. Then there is that song that my subconscious has decided will always remind me of this holiday. This year it's 'I've Gotta Feeling' by the Black Eyed Peas. It's playing now.

I find it fascinating how the mind picks on one song to be your summer soundtrack and how random that choice can be. Today I'm happy with the choice, but past years I've had inner issues with the selections that have included the awful 'Cartoon Heroes' by Aqua and a Spanish children's party hit!

Unfortunately, by time you read this, this morning will be just another holiday memory enhanced by photos, a fading tan and of course this song, a song that will forever be a part of my summer.

LOSING IT – Published 5th August 2010

Doris, my sat nav, let me down recently and left me lost in deepest Surrey. She is generally such a good navigator, but this day she decided to have a strop. Don't know why, perhaps that argument we had about a particular exit off the M4 the other week had upset her and was yet to be erased from her memory?

We were en-route when she claimed that her batteries were low and in need of some electrical substance. I obliged by connecting her to the cigarette lighter and it was then she refused to re-charge.

So there I was alone, looking for a village so small that it did not warrant an appearance on the map I had and on country roads where signposts were notable by their absence. There was only one thing I could do, and I apologise lads, but I asked for directions.

As the old man I asked gave me precise directions, I began to wonder what I ever saw in Doris. As he described every twist and turn, every left and right, I thought just how needlessly we rely on satellite technology, when a simple conversation can do just as well. It was all going so well until he said 'and then you get to the pub.' and stopped. 'And then I'm there?' I asked hopefully. 'No,' he sighed, 'but if you ask the landlord, he might know where you're going as I've never heard of the place.'

Oh come back Doris, I'm sorry.

THE DREAM IS OVER, LONG LIVE THE DREAM – Published 8th July 2010

Okay, re my last column and my World Cup dreams and Bambi fixation, well the dreams are shattered, Bambi is still on my hit-list and I'm now free on the 11th of this month.

Let's face it, with a lack lustre performance in the qualifiers and a controversial and calamitous confrontation with the Germans, (It was over the line by miles!), the only way England were going to stay in South Africa was if there was another volcanic ash cloud.

Apart from the obvious, one of my disappointments over the past few weeks has been the disappearance of the St George's flags and bunting that fluttered cheerfully in both the breeze and anticipation. I know some saw these varying displays of patriotism as tacky, but it cheered me and instilled a feeling of fun and hope in these times of such uncertainty.

I'm also going to miss those impromptu conversations with compete strangers of both sexes in shops, petrol stations and queues. Chats that started with 'Are you watching the match?' and finished with a sense of camaraderie that at other times remains hidden under English reserve and only briefly pops above the parapets during the run up to the festive season

As much as it pains me to say it, my World Cup dreams is over, but let's not stop the spontaneous socialising it created. We may not have the football to talk about anymore, (Well not for at least a month!) but we're British, there's always the weather.

WORLD CUP MEMORIES AND DREAMS – Published 10th June 2010

What do I remember of that summer's day in July 1966 when England won the World Cup and became the greatest football team in the world? I tell you what I remember, a 'Bambi' jigsaw.

There I was, while Dad screamed at the television as English football history was being made, on the front room floor looking for a piece of jigsaw that would complete Bambi's bottom. I can vividly remember that, but the excitement of the match was never logged. Admittedly I was only five at the time, but how I wished I had remembered it. Why didn't Dad tell me to stop mucking around with a pathetic puzzle and watch the football? Perhaps he tried and gave up because I was more intent in finding Bambi's missing cheek. Curse you Bambi.

So I missed out on that particular England memory, but I remember crying when Bonetti fluffed the save from Muller, screaming when Maradona punched the ball into the net, inconsolable when Pearce, Waddle and Batty missed penalties, gob-smacked when Seaman was caught napping and forever cursing penalty shoot-outs. I didn't miss any of them, forty four years of hurt forever etched into my memory.

However, this year, there's a chance, that on the eleventh of July, I'll remember exactly where I was, remember exactly who I was with, remember exactly what I was doing and most of all, remember exactly how I felt when England won the 2010 World Cup and maybe, just maybe, I'll forgive Bambi.

FLICKERS OF BRAY – Published 13th May 2010

I was saddened to hear that the final credits may roll on our little slice of Hollywood on the banks of the Thames at Bray.

Once Bray Studios was home to the blooded fangs, heaving bosoms and quintessential British 'Hammer' monsters movies of the fifties and sixties and should not be allowed to disappear like a vampire on a sun-bed.

Not as grand and glamorous as its neighbours, Pinewood and Shepperton, this unique studio has both cinematic and local heritage. The original house, Down Place, dates back to the 17th century and the studios are where the cult classic 'The Rocky Horror Show' was filmed, along with some of the groundbreaking miniature special effects work on 'Aliens'. I personally spent some very happy years working at this friendly studio on productions such as Gerry Anderson's 'Terrahawks' and 'Dick Spanner PI.'

I know that today the studio may not be thriving, but it's surviving, playing host to the odd feature film, TV programmes and commercials, as well as offering rehearsal spaces to the likes of Cliff Richard, Eric Clapton and The Kings of Leon. So rather like the vampires that roamed the back-lot, it's not quite dead yet.

In this media obsessed world, where every other graduate seems to have a degree in the visual arts, there must be something that can be done to save Bray Studios? Surely letting this original Hammer House of Horrors be replaced by a faceless residential complex would be the biggest horror of them all.

RUSTLE CROW – Published 15th April 2010

This month I have had problems with Rustlers. No, I've not had any cows stolen from my front garden, but I have had visits to the theatre and cinema spoilt by them.

The 'Rustlers' I'm referring to are those people who find it impossible not to fidget, twiddle or make annoying noises when watching a play or a film.

I was in the cinema recently and sat behind a gent who having already noisily unwrapped the crackling cellophane from his hard boiled sweet, spent the rest of the film intermittently fiddling with the wrapping. Annoying though it was, the volume of the film did mask this irritation somewhat, unlike when in the theatre.

That night I found myself sat behind a woman who spent the entire play either sorting out the contents of her handbag or taking off and putting on her coat and scarf with an alarming regularity. There was more movement in that seat than there was on the stage.

Not one to cause a scene, I did offer some hard stares when she looked around to see who was sighing behind her every time she jangled some keys or fiddle with a snappy spectacle case.

When the play finished I leant forward and was about to pass a comment on her distracting behaviour when she turned to her companion and said, 'Nice play, just a shame the actors couldn't speak a bit louder, I could hardly hear them.' I said nothing and walked away... in bewildered silence.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS – Published 18th March 2010

It's time for me to enter The Battle of the Bands. Firstly, litter is litter, no matter which way you look at it, but I think there are more unsavoury sights fluttering in gutters and swinging in plastic bags from trees, than a scattering of red rubber bands.

The initial argument that these loops of elastic could harm wildlife was well put. However, where are they placed in the league of dangerous detritus amongst the likes of discarded plastic bags, thrown away takeaways and pooch poo? Surely they are more 'Portsmouth' than 'Manchester United'.

Unless there is Phantom Red Rubber Band Dropper in our midst, then the fault must rest on the already heavily burdened shoulders of the Postie. Saying that, I'm sure in most cases, the dropping isn't deliberate. Similarly, the excuse that there isn't time for every dropped band to be picked up, is a little stretched. I wouldn't mind certain bills being delayed for the sake of a couple of retrieved rubber bands.

With public services disappearing faster than winners of X-Factor, I don't think 'Shaming' the postal service is going to help. Highlighting their responsibilities regarding litter is correct, but collecting the offending items and using them as evidence is pointless. Wouldn't it be better if we worked together? 'Posties' pick up what you can and 'collectors' why not take your ball of bands to your local Post Office, who I'm sure could return them to the sorting office to be reused. What could be simpler?

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS? – Published 18th February 2010

There is a question that is perplexing me at the moment. There must be an answer to it somewhere, but for the life of me I can't find it. The question being 'Why have some dog owners started hanging their plastic bags of dog mess from the overhanging branches of trees?'

I just don't understand. Am I missing something? I'm not a dog owner, so I'm curious as to these recent additions to our trees and hedgerows. Is it more environmentally friendly to hang 'what Rover did' in full view, rather than putting it in appropriate dog litter bins or disposing of it discreetly at home? Does the height and being open to the elements help the contents inside break down quicker? Does the fall from the tree, when the bag rips, help distribute the decaying doggy doings more evenly on the ground?

On a recent stroll with the better half, a normally pleasant tree-lined path was festooned with these gently bobbing reminders of how much easier cats are to look after. Not the most pleasant of sights to grace our local countryside.

Perhaps I'm barking up the wrong tree here and most dog owners aren't responsible for these dirty decorations, but someone is leaving these bags of unpleasantness behind. Perhaps other less health conscious parties are involved. Maybe the same people who plant empty beer cans in horse droppings. Just who are these hangers-on? Why do they do it? Do they wash their hands afterwards? I'm intrigued to know.

RUNNING INTO TROUBLE – Published 21st January 2010

As a jogger of no fixed speed, I enjoy running around the highways and byways of our area and the recent Artic conditions have not stopped my energetic excursions. I do run a bit slower and have been developing a sense of balance that would impress the Dancing On Ice judges, but I have also come across a situation that is causing me some concern.

How do I run past someone who is walking ahead of me, with their back to me, wrapped up against the cold, without frightening the living wotsits out of them?

Normally the slap of trainers and my laboured breathing or even a theatrical cough is warning enough, but when my impending arrival is muffled by woolly hats, ear muffs, scarves, hoods and in one case, headphones, what chance do I have? Already this year I've made two dog walkers jump their own body height in fright and on one occasion was accused of creeping up on a gent as he strolled in the snow. Now, I'm not a fast runner, but my pace is hardly a creep.

Being a courteous jogger I always apologise for my sudden appearance, but one day I'm going to shock the wrong person and end up limping into casualty. What can I do? I've thought about carrying a very, very long stick that I could gently prod the back of the person I'm about to pass a few metres before I do so, but am I just running into trouble?

A BIT OF CHRISTMAS WRAPPING – Published 24th December 2009

I can't wrap Christmas presents. No matter how much I try, me, sticky tape, scissors and wrapping paper, just don't get on. It's not that I'm some cack-handed-sausage-fingered-imbecile, for normally I have good eye-to-hand motor skills. I can draw and I'm quite nimble-fingered when picking out tunes on the ukulele, but when it comes to covering a gift with a brightly coloured sheet of paper, I, rather like the paper, go to pieces.

The first thing to abandon me is estimating paper to present coverage. It's either too much or much too little. Many a sheet of festive wrapping paper has become hamster bedding after it failed to fully cover the present I'm trying to wrap.

I watch in awe as my wife folds and creases her paper into technically perfect angles with the dexterity of a black-belt origami master. Folds interlock with symmetrical precision, delicately embracing the contours of the present and then are anchored with the merest sliver of tape. With me, the paper ends up with more creases than an unwashed suit and folds with more unusual angles than a Guy Richie film. As for sticky tape, I use more on one present than is used on a complete series of Blue Peter. The final result is frightening and I'm sure the recipients of my presents are only eager to get to the gift within so they can rid themselves of the hideous wrapping.

Next year I'm giving everyone a book token... in an envelope. Merry Christmas.

TURN IT UP – Published 26th November 2009

Come closer as I've got to keep my voice down because apparently in this cotton-wool clad society we live in, noise is bad. It appears that for some local authorities, anything louder than a flea passing wind in a library is a blight on our sensitive ears. This 'silence is golden' mentality is worrying me, especially when it seems intent in targeting live music.

I'm not turning a deaf ear to anti-social noise, but I am concerned that social noise like live music will suffer if these overly sensitive rules regarding volume control creep silently into our area. Noise patrols with the power to pull the plug on tunes louder than one of Timmy Mallet's shirts is a frightening concept.

John Lennon said 'Give Peace a Chance' but it's pushing it a bit when local bands playing at a decent time and volume in venues in and around our area, play in fear of a visit from these potential Off-Switchfinder Generals. Fear, that their gigs will be reduce to acoustic renditions of the sound of silence.

Music needs a certain amount of volume and I'm sure some will agree with me that the reverberations of these hushed actions would sound a muffled death knell for live music and to some extent, live entertainment.

I also suspect that there are some who would welcome the quiet, but I do believe something should be done before live music is too quiet to enjoy. It's just a shame I can't shout about it.

CAN I HELP? – Published 1st October 2009

While researching an article about Bray Studios for a nostalgia magazine that looks back at the days when e-mail was something a Yorkshire postman delivered, I chanced upon a perfect reference book. Not having enough financial wherewithal to rub two credit card bills together, I decided to ring my local library.

‘It’s called ‘Hammer Films – The Bray Years.’ I said. ‘That sounds interesting.’ Said a very pleasant sounding lady, adding that she was taking notes. Pleasant and efficient, how refreshing. ‘Do you have the author’s name?’ She enquired. ‘Wayne Kinsey.’ I replied and pictured her carefully writing the name down with exquisite handwriting. ‘You did say ‘Wayne’? She asked. I confirmed as such and waited as she went off to look.

After a couple of seconds of silence and not a version of the 1812 overture played on the comb, she returned. ‘I’m so sorry, but I can’t find it’ She apologised. ‘Have you tried the library?’ ‘But isn’t this...’ was as far as I got before she told me that I had rung the local nursery.

Understandably embarrassed, I made my excuse and hung up, but the thought of this pleasant lady, obviously well trained in customer relations, rifling through the likes of ‘The Very Hungry Caterpillar’ and ‘The Big Fat Hen’ looking for a book about a series of rather explicit horror films, proved to me that in this cynical world, there are still people willing to help even when the chances of success are oh so limited.

GOING TO B&Q – Published 1st October 2009

I had to buy some shelf brackets last weekend, and the sweats started Friday night. 'Dread' slumped in my stomach and 'anxiety' wandered aimlessly around my head, like the road layout of the new Sainsbury's car park.

After a restless night, the moment of loathing was soon upon me and it was time to say goodbye to my family, for who knows how long, and travel to that place, where many go in and just give up hope. Yes. I had to go to B&Q in Cippenham: 'B' as in building materials and 'Q' as in queue endlessly.

The journey begins along the slowest road in Christendom, the Bath Road. A road that possesses more red lights than Amsterdam and is so slow that it's been known for MOT's to run out mid journey.

Crawling into the labyrinth of lost hope deemed the 'car park', lives are wasted searching for a space, knowing that if it's this busy here amongst the exhaust and expletives, inside it will be worst. And it is.

Looking for carefully hidden products sucks up your time and assistants taunt you with promises of 'They're in aisle 19.' They never are.

Eventually you find what you seek and then join the almost endless shuffling lines of weekend DIY'ers watching their life ebb away for the want of a packet of screws and a shelf bracket.

You wait but you know the ordeal is far from over. Outside the queues are already forming, making the expectation of a return home before nightfall, a fruitless dream.