apta

March 17, 2020

Start of the self imposed "self-isolation" - Day minus 11

Meg and I had intended to visit others in North Wales over Wednesday but have called off our trip as the situation changes rapidly. We had a lovely time in Tom Mackenzie's church but the Coronavirus crisis has overshadowed life since then and so I'll begin with Tuesday.

Today was an interesting day. I got to the pharmacy to pick up some medication at about 8.0am and then on to our local doctor which had been pretty overwhelmed by the crisis. Our surgeries were not at all ready for coronavirus when it first hit but they have now put in place a system which seems to be working well. Our doctor's surgery is now operating on a "triage" system and I was directed to wait about 5 minutes outside and then called in by a doctor who I'd never met before. I was then directed to a room where I was asked questions by a doctor who I'd never met before. I was then directed to a room where I was asked questions by a doctor who I'd never met before. I was then directed to a room where I was asked questions

Diary

apta

Sunday, 29th March, 2020

[Day 12]

I always think that the day after the clocks go forward is the first actual day of spring, whatever the date of the Spring equinox. It is nice to get an hour of light at the end of the day. Although it means having to get up an hour earlier, the hours of daylight are increasing, and I can see the difference in the amount of light in the morning, even though it is still very dark when I take the first walk of the day. Furthermore, we decided to devote the time a good chunk of the hours, since that our neighbours, who are all in their late 70s and early 80s, seem to be having a tough time of it. We spent the morning with difficult job of trying to make sure they have some little piles of things on their doorsteps. Nevertheless, it is still very strange, I have now discovered a collection which had been temporarily mislaid, two books that were in place than I did not expect. Although I had thought that I had managed to find everything that needed to be found, it turns out that I had not. I had a call for fundraising purposes from a charity that I have supported for many years. Although I had thought that I had managed well enough, I was surprised by the amount of money I had actually needed to hand over, a message to have been left slightly adjusted for being a little more generous than I had thought I had been. I had a call from a friend who had been trying to get a delivery slot for groceries from Ocado, and I promised to say that I still had at least one slot yet. Ocado is quite notoriously consisting of things in cans from the cupboard, books, newspapers articles, letters to the DWL, etc. (Choice is Best Cheese I will forget about it completely although it is a good idea, and I do not know why I have never thought of it before.)

The evening is the part we managed to stick that side of Barney's birthday, which would have been a day of celebration, if we could have been pick in their bagels. We held the customary conversation at two metres distance and I have supplied him with sheets of paper, which I have printed out, which he is quite expecting. And I also an increase the amount that I will allow our nieces and nephew who are have a conversation.

My son managed to get a ticket for Sunday Times and an Observer which were very gratefully received. From the Sunday Times, I discovered the following:

10 Downing Street: Boris Johnson's Coronavirus Diary

Boris Johnson's Coronavirus Diary

Our dependable correspondent, who is at least quite rolling whatever Prime challenged over the contact tracers established by the government before their visits fact, the response by various government ministers to strong other complete procrastination or the Prime Minister's Coronavirus Diary. Boris Johnson's Coronavirus Diary. Boris Johnson's Coronavirus Diary. Boris Johnson's Coronavirus Diary. what is actually known pathologist that has an could probably whole the organs report which

1 delta Nov (2004)

Reply Forward

apta

Monday,30th March,2020

[Day 14]

As the start of another week - and the end of our first fortnight of self-isolation. We were really looking forward this morning to taking delivery of our first Waitrose 'Click and Collect' groceries which we had ordered, by no one picking up for us from Waitrose Ealing Broadway. We had ordered a slot for 10 am, and we had been sent a text at 9 am saying that our order was being picked. We waited and waited, and at 10.30 we had a group of Ealing Broadway, I have never seen a uniformed police officer patrolling the street outside our flat before. We had to call the police station to report that our groceries had been stolen, and we had to wait for the police officer to arrive to take our statements. The Manor Vanquish, the last visual aid I ever saw, I don't think I will ever be keep on repeating until the study and the rest of the known and is a completely into safe and orderly state. Another book that I had ordered from Amazon Marketplace arrived yesterday, and I was pleased to see that it had been in the post-office for the morning. I was very approached by several colleagues, including Olga whose surname has a of a impossible discount.

1 delta Nov (2004)

Reply Forward

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Tuesday, 31st March, 2020

[Day 15]

A beautiful bright day today and consequently the yard somewhat lacking of day-walkers than normal - I have we could see about so people to enter their lives. I was thinking about whether if we were spotted by neighbours, I am sure they would be very, very, very,

large casserole of it. Typically it would four different kinds of fish (salmon, haddock, cod or plaice, prawns) with a bottom supplied by sliced (parboiled) potatoes and a topping of mashed potatoes and shredded cheese. I do cheat a little and add some Schwartz Fish Pie or White Wine sauce if I have in stock - the subsequent meals are really quick because it only takes about 3 minutes in the microwave and is normally accompanied by tender-stem broccoli. I realise this is not everyone's taste but I am trying to cut down on my consumption of meat (for a host of reasons) and increase that of fish.

In terms of political news, I observed that the Twittersphere was getting incensed by the news that Boris Johnson has been amusing himself during his recovery by playing Sudoku. The particular object of anger was with the rest of the Main Stream Media (MSM) for giving prominence to such trivia at a time when the best part of 1000 people a day are dying - surely there are more penetrating questions that journalists should be asking. Also quoted today was the estimate by a domestic abuse charity that in a single day last year the number of cases which it had to deal had risen by 120%. But most anger (in the press and which I shares) was the briefing given by Priti Patel who was asked to apologise the fact that many of the deaths of NHS personnel from the COVID-19 virus auld be attributed to their lack of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment). After being asked twice if she would apologise to NHS staff and their families over the shortages of PPE, Ms Patel said: "I'm sorry if people feel that there have been failings. I will be very, very clear about that." This must rank as one of the most half-hearted, weasely-worded apologies of all time - a point quickly picked up by the press.

We FaceTimed our dearest and closest friends in Spain in the evening. I think it is true to say that whilst the death rate in Spain is now at a three week low, the population is starting to feel the pressure of a very strictly enforced lock-down policy - for example , only one person is allowed out of the house at a time and that to walk the dog but only a distance of 200 metres (but it can be done twice a day) It may come to that yet in the UK and some are thinking that if the WestMidlands continues to be such a hot-spot, that day might not be too far off!

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Sunday, 12th April, 2020

[Day 27]

This must be one of the strangest Easter Sundays that any of us have ever experienced but I suppose we will all get used to living in strange times. This morning we were delighted to make our daily trip to the park which, actually, was extremely quiet compared with yesterday. I am pleased to report that the duckings now number 5 from that we suspect is brood No. 2. Whilst we were having our daily coffee (necessary for the 'oldies' to regain their strength after an energetic 1km walk to the park, you understand) we had a couple of conversations, one with the elderly lady with whom we exchanged wartime reminiscences early on in the week, and the other with Julie, our "Waitrose" friend. In the midst of our conversations, a family swooped and nearly made off with one of the ducklings, only to be beaten off by an assiduous mother duck. And so to home, where we enjoyed a nice dinner of roast beef, cooked in our slow cooker (and I saved half of the joint for another Sunday lunch). In the afternoon, I undertook one of my regular duties which is to round the house, wiping each light switch with an anti-bacteriological wipe which may, or may not, fend off the COVID-19 virus. This task doesn't take that long but I am amazed how many light switches there are in the house overall (I lose count after the first 20!) I feel that I will have to have some degree of success as that enjoyed by the elderly gentleman who used to throw little pieces of pink paper out of the top of the Champion omnibus in order to scare the horses. He was always successful, by the way, as no doubt I will be.

In the early evening, I was playing about with the *FaceTime* contacts list that *FaceTime* displays when an older Winchester colleague accidentally made me a video-call. He intended to call his son but hit the wrong button! I was delighted and we exchanged notes. They were amazed at the sojourns that Meg and I enjoy on our local park bench as down in Southampton, the local officials have taped up all of the park benches to deter would-be loiterers and aged rest-takers from utilising them - I must say, that I feel that it is a bit over the top. Incidentally, after my encounter with the flesh-coloured tights lady yesterday, we were passed in the park today (at a suitable distance) by a lady runner who was displaying a full face-load of makeup complete with false eyelashes and sporting a fetching leopard-skin leotard (or whatever you call the gear that people run in these days).

In the early evening, we watched the rerun of last Thursday's *Question Time* on the Parliament channel (232). We then had a *FaceTime* chat with my sister (who I didn't realise had an IPad) so that was a pleasant bonus and we are now arrangements in place to *FaceTime* the rest of the family as well, once we have suitable times organised. We are also in email contact with one of *Meg*'s cousin's daughters who had been re-located before the crisis to Seattle. We received a long email telling us that things were like in the USA from the inside and are making similar arrangements to *FaceTime* each other as soon as time zones and diaries allow. So all in all, we have had a fully communication-rich Sunday - we wonder what the forthcoming week is going to bring. If the crisis had any benefits whatsoever, it was to appreciate how lucky we are to have family and friends with whom we can rapidly communicate - perhaps this will set up a good model for the future when we don't neglect the friends that we have as we were forced to do during our working years.

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Monday 13th April, 2020

[Day 28]

Last night, a brief but very intense squall hit the Midlands - when we woke up this morning, we discovered that two owls had been smashed to pieces and the body parts lay scattered around the patio we have outside the house in the back garden. Before readers recoil in absolute horror, I ought to mention that the owls in question were china owls (well, pot actually) and had been residing on our outside patio table. So what were they doing there in the first place? Well, the story is this. Last summer, I renovated some aluminium garden furniture (table and four chairs) by repainting them with a dark green 'Hammerite' paint. However, a local robin had taken to perching on the back of one of the newly painted chairs and was threatening to "poop" all over my handiwork. In order to preserve their renovated status, I scoured the local Charity shops (of which we have at least half a dozen) and managed to secure two pottery owls, often used as money boxes, They were put at slightly different angles and they were used to deter robins and the like from messing up our garden furniture. Unfortunately, the storm arose before I had the chance to lay them flat and they paid the ultimate sacrifice…

This morning the normal pattern repeated itself in that we exchanged several pleasantries with dog walkers in the park but we did not carry long as there was quite a brisk wind. On the way back home we did have a chat with one near neighbours who live just around the corner but with whom we have not had the chance of an extended conversation before today. They were digging over and renovating a little triangular plot in front of their house and they had been waiting for a spot of rain so the earth would have softened a bit before they started digging and planting. We mentioned to each other that one of the side effects of the present crisis was that once people had got bored with decorating, gardening and spring cleaning they would revert to more traditional modes of home entertainment and the experts were predicting a 'baby boom' in about nine months from now. We reminisced that the last time a national crisis brought together groups of neighbours was in 1973 when the country as a whole had to endure a three-day week as well as intermittent power disconnections of both gas and electricity. The official (Conservative) government advice, which we followed enthusiastically was that we should "shower with a friend" to save the country's diminished energy supplies. "Oh, *that's interesting*" the wife of the couple remarked '*as I was born in 1974!*' We giggled and wondered!

In the late afternoon, we were delighted to have an hour-long *FaceTime* video link with my wife's cousin's daughter (is that called a 'cousin once removed'?) We found out how at first hand how COVID-19 crisis was affecting the USA - predictably, the Democratic states were blaming the lack of preparedness on President Trump whilst the more red-neck states (Inland, Republican) were inclined to believe that it was all a conspiracy to attempt to discredit Trump! Whereas here in the UK, we quickly added shops selling alcohol (off-licenses) to the essential stores such as supermarkets, pharmacies and garages the Americans had decided that it was a top priority to keep open - the gun stores! One really has to wonder. Now that we have discovered the joys of *FaceTime*-ing, we wonder why we have not done it long before. Of course, it does assume that you have Apple technology at both ends but given that the Apple Contacts pages give you one link to activate, then what could be easier?

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Tuesday, 14th April, 2020

[Day 29]

A busier than usual day in our local park today. We espied our friend Julie from 200 metres away as she was nearing the end of an hour-long walk and so another long and interesting chat. Julie told us about a flowering cherry in full bloom that had been felled in the recent storm but I think it's not an unusual occurrence. We have an occasional gardener who tells us that quite a lot of trees in the area have keeled over because the water table is so high after the recent rains so they lose their footing. Incidentally, did you know that scientists think that trees have developed some communication systems with each other via their extensive root systems? It's not quite as daft as it sounds. We then had another chat with another of ex-Waitrose friends who is the mother of two twin girls. She was in good heart but somewhat tired as she was only getting a couple of hours sleep before it was interrupted by one or other of the girls. On our way out this morning, I decided to make a present of a magnificent hoe made by Wolf tools that I think is technically called a 'push-pull' weeder. It has a flattish blade but with a wavy front edge and is magnificent for quickly cultivating some ground if it has been recently been dug over. It works by cutting off any the heads of any tiny little weeds which then shrivel up and die on the surface of the soil. I think this particular hoe was given to me over thirty years ago as a birthday present but as I have another more up-to-date model of this type, I was willing for its older brother to go to a good home. When we got home, we found some Easter cup-cakes had been delivered to us a 'thank you' and they were delicious.

We spent a very pleasant afternoon taking coffee with our new next-door neighbours. They have been incredibly busy juggling work commitments and getting the bungalow exactly to their likes which has involved building a conservatory, trying to reconfigure the whole of the garden and so on. They (and we) have been so busy of late that it was great to spend the day in each company - as it happens we think alike on many issues (such as the mutual loathing of Donald Trump, for example). As it happens, I had one or two garden implements that helped my neighour with some difficult tasks (removing old concrete posts, for example).

We see that the Government has today reverted to its traditional mode of lying to us. We had a graph which showed the UK death rate below other European societies, particularly France - but the UK figures included only the deaths recorded in hospital and were not comparable with the more inclusive figures than the French data which included all COVID-19 deaths, whether in hospital or elsewhere. When one of the journalists pointed this out in the press conference, there was the usual obfuscation, answering a question that was not actually posed, trotting out that it was the government's intention to… and so on. There happened to be a letter in today's *Times* which argued that journalists should only ask yes/no questions and be prepared to relentlessly until the question that has been asked is actually answered instead of being evaded, met with a half-truth, statement of the obvious and so on. In general, at the daily press conferences, the journalists nearly always do ask pointed and well-directed questions but the respiles are nearly evasive. The favourite seems to be answer a question that was not actually asked or else to think of a answer with a really big number in it that is meant to impress but is really meaningless. My particular gripe is over the claim that the NHS frontline has recently been supplied with 'x' million pieces of equipment which does not answer the question that the front line is evidently short of PPE and needs a lot more!

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Wednesday, 15th April, 2020

[Day 30]

It seems incredible to me that we are mid-way through April already - the months go faster and faster. Today, I met an acquaintance in the park who knew two of my sets of acquaintances but who I didn't know knew each other. This got me thinking a bit about how networks of social relationships develop. I am going to be a little more theoretical but bear with me and you will see where I am going. When I was at university in the mid-1960s, one of our tutors was Professor Ronald Frankenberg who compiled a book called '*Communities in Britain*'. Sociologists and social anthropologists had written a series of studies starting with simple fishing, mining and agricultural communities and progressing through larger and more complex communities including small market towns. The idea was to build a type of continuum of the way that communities had developed through time from simple to more complex. In a theoretical chapter at the end, Frankenberg attempts to arrive at a theoretical and mathematical understanding of the way in which we can describe communities using social network and communication theory. He borrowed from a 1949 work '*On Human Communication*' to show how messages arrive from A to B. Put simply, if A is connected to B and the link is broken, then communication cannot occur. If however, there are some other points in the system (let us call them C and D) then if the link between A and B is broken, it is still possible to get a message through the system by going through C or D. This is technically called *redundancy* by telecommunication engineers - put really simply, the more extra nodes there are in the system (i.e. the more redundancy) the greater a chance the message will be delivered. If we take an example from the last war - if the British had bombed a railway line between two German cities and they were only connected by one direct line, then the effect would be no trains!. But now imagine the Germans attempting to bomb a railway line shaft we say between Birmingham and Manchester. The railway chiefs could always reroute a train through '*Didley Squat Junction*' and the train would get through eventually, albeit with a little delay. This must actually be happening all the time on the World Wide Web - if one link is down then a router will despatch messages in different directions to ensure that the email gets delivered. Frankenberg's great insight was, I believe, that we can define a 'community-ness' by the amount of redundancy as well as by the connectedness of the system. Can you see where I started off and where I am going from with this idea?

In the late afternoon, we *FaceTimed* some of our closest friends who described to us how they ought to have been in receipt of the government letter, sent to all people with complex medical needs (which the husband of our friends certainly has) Put briefly, life had been very stressful trying to get supermarket slots, medication and the like. However, through some kind of systems failure, the letter had failed to be sent or to arrive - but when part of the medical networks caring for our friend realised this they got the wheels in motion and suddenly everything changed dramatically and life got a lot easier as they could now get the priority access through supermarket queues to which they are thoroughly entitled (but which hitherto had failed to materialise) So gradually things are starting to get better.

Some sad COVID-19 related news for us today. One of my daughter-in-law's relatives had died of the virus (although he was of an advanced age and suffering from dementia) We were also saddened to hear that one of our closest friends in Leicestershire had also suffered a bereavement - first the mother died last autumn and then one of her own sons died of oesophageal cancer in the last day or, with very few family members or friends being allowed to attend the funeral. This must be happening to families up and down the country…

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Thursday, 16th April, 2020

[Day 31]

One of the joys of stopping for chats with people is that you discover new points of contact that you never knew that you had in common. And so it proved today when we were chatting with acquaintances along the Kidderminster Road (up and down which we walk daily) only to discover that we had stayed in some of the same places in Spain (Calella, north of Barcelona) Then in turn we chatted to their neighbour who, as it turned out, was a French national by origin and was a teacher of both French and Spanish. So suddenly our number of 'Spanish' connections seemed to increase rapidly.

In common with many other people I use the app on my mobile phone called *WhatsApp* but as this is designed specifically for a mobile, it is not designed to work on a desktop. However, it is so much easier typing on a 'proper' keyboard rather than using the fiddly keys on a mobile - I find that even though I bought a slightly bigger than normal iPhone than normal two years ago (an *iPhone 8 Plus*), my fingers still cover three of the keys at once and despite Apple technology 'learning' your particular typing style, I still make multiple errors when texting (and that is before predictive texting takes over). So I was delighted when I found a way to get a version of *WhatsApp* to run through a browser on one's desktop, so I spent a certain amount of time last night playing with some of the people in my 'Contacts' section (brought over from my iPhone) and sending them a message saying I was experimenting an inviting a reply to see if the messages had actually got through (which they had). Incidentally, one of the interesting features about the command 'Save' that you actually have started a transmission process (analogous to popping a letter in the post) and do not know whether (a) the message has actually been delivered, let alone read and (b) whether the message was understood. I remember an incident in the comedy series '*Only Fools and Horses*' in which *Rodney* and *Delboy* were tested at a local hospital for some condition or other and when they came out they were back saying the results were 'Negative', they interpreted this communication from the hospital as though they had contracted a fatal disease from which they would die (a 'negative' outcome)

It being a fine afternoon, I gave our communal lawns (500m²) their weekly cut and my trusty '*Stiga*' (Swedish) petrol mower behaved flawlessly .The only thing I did after it faltered once or twice last week was to soak the sponge air filter in engine oil. After a quick Google search, I have now come to appreciate that this is essential and not just an optional extra - apparently, unfiltered air can rip through and damage your engine but the addition of engine oil makes the filter much more 'sticky' as minute particles of pollen and dust which can damage the engine are trapped much more efficiently if the foam air filter is correctly oiled with engine oil. Now I know! When this was done I emailed my very old (in both senses of the word) friend and former colleague with whom I worked in the *Central Office of Information* (COI) in 1966. I was keen that we both keep in touch during the current crisis so I have given her the choice of communicating via email (which I suspect she prefers), SMS (text), *FaceTime*, *WhatsApp* or *Skype*. I'll have to wait to get her reply before deciding which to use on a regular basis.

Tonight being Thursday, we had our usual '*Clap for our Carers*' session at 8.00 pm. Methinks the response was a little bit down this week but I am still delighted that there are people in our local community who still care. My son rings a bell whilst I bang an open aluminium cooking pot with a spoon which makes a really raucous din. Immediately after this, *Question Time* was transmitted at 8.00 on BBC1 and one of the panellists, a doctor, argued that wearing a mask may not protect you from the virus but reduces any virus load that you may eject by a cough or a sneeze to 1/36th of the virus load. If true, this makes the case for wearing masks to prevent onward transmission (rather than to protect oneself) almost unanswerable. I think I would like to see it happen but I suspect the government with its present problems would rather not know!

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Friday, 17th April, 2020

[Day 32]

Well, today has been one of those indeterminate days where nothing has really gone right - we all have days like that. The spell of good weather is coming to an end although a spattering of rain arrived in the afternoon, the weather was sufficiently fine for us to enjoy our customary walk to the park. However, the colder weather was keeping the joggers away and all but the most determined dog walkers so we quickly drank up our coffee and made for home - but we did have the bonus of chatting to two of our closest friends on Kidderminster Rd on the way home. As it happens, they were on the way out to enjoy their constitutional so it was a happy coincidence that we did not miss each other.

In the afternoon, I had set myself the task of trying to chase the Insurance claim for the holiday that we had booked for Porto in Portugal in mid-May. As you might expect, this was problematic from the word go. The insurance company, even contacted them by phone (in desperation) will refuse any claim if Expedia has not issued a cancellation invoice. In the meantime, the Expedia website is completely overwhelmed and speaking to a 'human' is impossible. They have an automated system to respond to queries that refused to recognise the itinerary number or my email address although I have the original confirmation in January ready to quote to them. Eventually, I gleaned from the insurance company that even I had been able to speak to an agent on Expedia, they would refuse to deal with me until the planned holiday was only 10 days away. So I put a note on the calendar and resolved to contact them (if I could) a bit nearer our planned departure date. To cap it all, as I started out to write this blog I received a communication from Expedia asking me whether I would like to cancel (which I did) and then intimating that for the outward leg of the journey, the airline Iberia would offer me a voucher for the unused flight and British Airways would do the same for the return leg of the journey. So the whole thing is turning into a logistical nightmare, given that nobody will be flying anywhere for months ahead, so far as we can tell! But enough of these woes and now for more serious issues.

The lack of the UK's government's preparation for the COVID-19 crisis is really starting to unwind this weekend. As I write, there appear to be indications that trusts all over the country will run out of gowns which are necessary to don before one can treat patients without putting your own health/life at risk. The official line appears to be 'see if you can wash it and use it again' which implies instant turn around laundry and sterilisation issues not to mention wear and tear. I have also some intimations, both personally and through the columns of *Health Services Journal* that the situation in Accident and Emergency departments is fast deteriorating. It appears that 'normal' A&E admissions are not taking place so many suspected heart attacks, strokes, and potential cancers are now not being treated, as potential patients are too scared or unwilling to attend A&E departments. Last nights '*I*' newspaper, which I haven't had the chance to read or verify, is arguing that we may be saving some COVID-19 patients' lives but the collateral damage in untreated cancers, strokes and heart attacks might mean that there are an additional 60,000 deaths (i.e. 4 times of the present COVID-19 death rate) The A&E departments themselves are, anecdotally, being populated by victims of domestic violence, botched suicide attempts, and alcohol abuse problems. I wish I could end on a more cheerful note but it is not possible. I wonder what the inevitable 'official' inquiry will reveal if one is held when the immediate crisis is over.

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In the Future!

Entry not yet completed...

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