

HO HO HO etc. The festive season is upon us again. Time to look back at the year with the old rose tinted and plan ahead, (or for the pessimists, brace yourself) for the next. Being in tune with nature and looking forward to the season's bounty is all very well, but it usually requires a bit more work and a bit less contemplation. The poly-tunnel (with its now fully automatic watering system) does well on the bounty side of things, mainly because Fiona seems to like pottering about in there for more hours than I could manage. The refurbished ancient tractor is working well. (1957, It's actually younger than I am), I just wish repair was as easy for humans, though I'm not sure how I'd react to an amateur taking me to pieces. Something the smarter robots may be thinking about even now. How long will it be before you have to get consent from your car before you can lift the bonnet? Will robotic cars demand a retirement garage?

Projects this last year have included external cladding of the house and a Summer-house.....well a lot of recycled stuff nailed to the side of the garden shed and called a Summer house, in the hope that it will attract summer weather.

It all started because I was given some old church windows. I had a couple of sheets of roofing profile (corrugated iron in modern guise) left over from the refurbished wood shed and a reclaimed large window. (actually from our old house) Recycled floorboards and bits of school shed made the floor and walls. Some bits of surplus insulation board keeps it at about the right temperature in the Scottish summer, and some neighbours gave us a couple of rather nice wicker chairs. Ideal place for an evening G&T Especially when the (summer insect) midges are about. The next question is how it deals with damp and the colder weather, since there is no heater, (maybe a ventilator later).

If it snows before Christmas I'll get a suitable photo for the other corner of this e-card. Failing that it's Kittens in snow!

The house seems warmer with the external cladding and a couple of replacement double glazed units, (one door and one large window), but it is difficult to tell because the thermostat keeps it at the correct temperature of 18°C and the costs are for the electricity that operates the heat-pump, which is in turn paid for by the solar panels. In the end I don't know how to calculate it except that the investment money would otherwise be bringing in 0% interest from the bank.

Entirely unnecessary, but very jolly, we lit the first wood fire on the Friday the 13th of November, which reminded me to cut some more

down for seasoning. (That's drying not salting.) I've got plenty in the woodshed, but Winter's the best time to cut, I've learned not to split frozen logs, it's difficult to control, harder work, and tries to bite your legs. Maybe I'll get an electric log splitter one day, but for now I like the exercise. Cutting down and cutting up trees followed by log splitting and stacking keep you warm four times before you light anything, and the ashes can go on the compost.

Many apologies to all those who have been worried or made fretful by the lack of newsletters. I have, through no fault of my own, become secretary to the Midge Club and consequently short of time owing to the calendar, the Club Magazine and related business. Other events have conspired to fill up my time. I'd make a New Year's resolution to learn to say no, but I thought "Shall I break last year's resolution not to have resolutions."... you can see where it's going can't you?

Anyway, we hope you all have really jolly Christmases, or the equivalent and ask you not to worry as to why spellcheck won't allow two esses in the end of plural 'Christmases' but demands two in 'Masses', nor indeed to worry as to how far into a Year you can wish a Happy New one.

Love from Jim and Fiona



Happy Christmas