

HOME ALONE

Richard Barr was 'home alone' after last **Christmas** and recorded the experience for posterity

After last Christmas, Richard's wife and his two stepdaughters literally went as far away as they could from him – to Melbourne, Australia, where one of them now lives and spends her days operating on people's brains. The saying about mice playing while the cat's away was disproved, as Richard thought he might get some work done, but did he succeed?

30TH DECEMBER

Socks undoubtedly hold the secret of our universe. No matter how carefully you pair them some always come out of the wash without their other halves. Stephen Hawking talks about the mysteries of black holes, but he need look no further than the mouth of our washing machine. I gave up, threw away the orphans and sent several bin bags to the clothes bank.

2ND JANUARY

Feeding the sheep I noticed a large tree had fallen down in the paddock – just where the fencing man was going to replace the fence. It was *good* because the tree at least had the courtesy to fall *before* the fence had been replaced, but *bad* because it had to be removed *before* the fencing man came.

3RD JANUARY

Struck down by a winter vomiting thing. I feel like death (not very) warmed up, but can't curl up in a ball because the animals need feeding, the house needs looking after and my

clients have discovered that Christmas is over and want action. Thanks to whoever gave me that New Year's present!

4TH JANUARY

While having my near-death experience, two of the sheep announced that they were lame. Out came the vet and in will come a massive bill in due course. Fortunately, I am now on the road to recovery.

Meant to start on the tree today, but discovered our only chainsaw had no chain – and was so old I had no prospect of ever getting one to fit. Drove to Norwich for a replacement, came home and cursed... it refused to work when plugged in. I was on the point of returning it when Philippa, our youngest stepdaughter, turned up. She looked at the saw and suggested I take off the safety catch. The saw immediately roared into life.

6TH JANUARY

Went to our local pub, the Poacher's Pocket, with my friend Jim this evening and was telling him about the chainsawing. He told me about how a woman was looking out of her window at some men chainsawing a fallen tree. The saw slipped and the man's leg went flying across the road. The woman fainted, and when she came round she saw the man hopping back across the road with his leg under his arm. It was a wooden leg. Possibly an urban myth, but entertaining all the same.

9TH JANUARY

Got the vet's bill for dealing with the sheep – £187.14. How much roast lamb would that buy? And the bloody sheep is still limping – ungrateful beast!

12TH JANUARY

Famous last words perhaps, but in the past forty-eight hours there have been no major disasters. I am now on



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a train back to Norfolk and keeping my fingers crossed that I do not see a glow on the horizon from the burning thatch, or find all fourteen sheep lying upside down with their legs in the air, or the cats having shredded the curtains (or each other).

15TH JANUARY

It's not fair. It's pushing thirty degrees in Melbourne and currently minus eight here. This weather is doing our Christmas tree no good. I put it outside after dragging it through the house. Normally, it lies there till spring, but it looks so dejected with snow falling on it that I may have to take it back in and put its decorations back on.

Saw my accountant, who had pleasure in telling me that I would be paying a million (or even a billion) times more tax than Starbucks, Amazon and Google put together. It could even be trillions, because however many times

you multiply it, so long as you start with zero, it remains zero.

16TH JANUARY

I woke to such a cold bedroom that there was frost on the inside of the panes. It took considerable willpower to heave myself out of bed. This delayed the animal food round till nearly noon, which involves feeding our useless chickens – the three of them have not laid an egg since September. Then I dealt with the girl sheep. They were at the far end of their field eating snow when they saw me and a bucket. We really must introduce sheep racing into Bacton. There was a thunder of hooves and the sheep were suddenly bearing down on me at close to the speed of sound. The trick is to get the food into their troughs *before* they arrive, otherwise I am likely to be trampled in the stampede.

In the other paddock are horses and the gay rams (see previous Home Farmers). However, there is a clash

between the rams and the horses. I have to keep them apart, otherwise they eat each other's food. Normally, the rams go into a pen for their nosh, and the horses eat out of buckets outside the pen. That is what I expected to happen today, but one ram was not playing; it just stood there doing nothing. When I looked closely it had a gash on its head. On the 'Glasgow Coma' scale it scored only three (the maximum for a sheep is, of course, five). It looked dazed, with little stars floating around above its head. I called out the vet again, who peered into the sheep's ear and could see right through to the other side – no problem there. He diagnosed concussion, injected expensive medication into the sheep and prepared the next bill. Now we have to wait to see if the sheep will require a special-needs assessment.

And that is where my diary ended, as the cat came home. It's likely we'll be snowed in again!