



# NEWSLETTER

## December 2015

### From the Chair.....

Hello all,

Who would have thought we were only a few days away until Christmas?? The ponies are still wearing cotton sheets as they are so warm, and Rambo already needs a second clip! This unseasonal weather has brought so much rain, it has resulted in nature not really knowing whether it's coming or going- the grass is still growing and Spring flowers are starting to bloom. And getting anything to dry is a nightmare!

We have had a cracking start to the winter dressage series- very busy and the Christmas competition produced some fabulous costumes- well done to everyone who got into the Christmas spirit. The pairs was brilliant and hopefully we will be able to run some more next year, along with the prix caprilli. Some photos are here for you to enjoy.

The quiz, though not supported as well as we would have liked, produced some keen competition and we also enjoyed the buffet provided by the Rose and Crown. Some of the questions are included for you to try.

Please remember that next month is the AGM. Linda would like to have any points cards as soon as possible beforehand- don't forget, points win prizes. There will also be a mini auction, so bring along anything that you no longer want or need (unwanted Christmas presents) to raise some money for the club's coffers.

In the meantime, may I take this opportunity to wish all our members a very merry Christmas and happy New Year- see you in 2016 ☺

Ros & the little people



VHPRC

Winter Dressage Series

Woodfield Stables

**WE ARE SEEKING HELPERS**

If you can help, or know someone who can, please get in touch

Contact: Laura Hayden

**We hold our meetings on the first Wednesday of the month**

**FABULOUS FOOD!**

**Rose & Crown,**

68 Parkfield Road, Pucklechurch, Bristol, BS16 9PS

## It shouldn't happen to .....

Sheila Bryant, who has been a regular speaker, has been posting a blog on facebook about what happens when the other half gets injured....she has agreed to let me share the events with VHPRC.....enjoy!

6<sup>th</sup> November: Poor Tone has broken his ankle. We are trying to work out logistics and it looks like I am going to have to become a Falconer!

7<sup>th</sup> November: Well, today was interesting. Started at 5.30am being awoken by Tony's alarm and having to get out of bed and get to where Henry Percy, the wayward peregrine was before light. It was his antics yesterday that made Tony slip down a very slippery bank and break his ankle. Percy is still out having had a dirty stop out all night. The theory is that once dark the bird will not fly anywhere else. He has a radio transmitter on. It was pissing down, blowing a gale and bloody dark this morning. As light broke I was to be found out in a field swinging a bit of dead something tied to the end of a bit of string, whistling frantically and shouting 'Hoe'. This was supposed to attract Percy for breakfast and he was supposed to be hungry and cold after being out all night. I was becoming increasingly neurotic as I watched my husband with a dustbin liner on his plastered leg, hopping around on leaf covered slippery banks trying to tell me what to do!!!

Percy did not come down to my lure swinging so we went home considerably wetter than we started. It was a couple of visits later, much lighter, a hungrier Percy and less rain that we finally found him. I am up in the wood swinging the string thing with a loudly beeping radio receiver. I am shouting to Tony to stay where he is and not try the bank when Tony shouts "I can see him, come down here NOW, quickly" Now, seeing as acting in that manner is exactly why Tony has a broken ankle I was considering his request with much caution. However, I did get there soon enough to encourage a hungry wet bird back to my gloved fist which was holding a soggy dead chick. All very gross really but rather exciting and very satisfying. Tony was weak with pleasure at seeing his beloved Percy, so that was good. I spent the afternoon looking at the emerging blueness of Tony's toes sticking out of his temporary plaster and telling him that if he did not now sit with it raised, the medics would not put him on a proper plaster on Monday as it would be too swollen. Needless to say, he is now behaving and sitting down.

10<sup>th</sup> November: Ok, my crash course in Falconry is not going too badly, apart that is, from Angry Arthur. Arthur is a Harris Hawk and, shall we say, he takes a while to get to like you, if at all. When approached by me he swears loudly at me in strong cawing bird type swearing and when offered my gloved hand to step onto, he launches and lands with a ferocious grip whilst continuing the loud swearing. I have tried, what Mabs, my mother would have termed 'mind over matter, and approached telling myself it's only a chicken. The problem is that this bloody chicken is a bit ferocious. I had a marvellous idea yesterday and found a Kevla knee pad that I had stored in the back of a cupboard and pulled this up over my upper arm. Its the sort of pad that you would use to protect against housemaids knee (not something I know much about!) or perhaps for a workman who lays a lot of paving slabs! So when armoured with my Kevla knee pad on my upper arm and an extended falconers glove on my lower arm and my mind telling me Arthur is a chicken; I approached singing, in what I hoped were lilting, dulcet tones to see if that helped. Well, it helped me I think being armoured, but it did not help Arthur's attitude. I am now wondering if it had to do with the fact that although my tones were dulcet and lilting I was actually calling him a bastard Pterodactyl. Perhaps tomorrow I will sympathise with his obvious fear and call him a lovely little chicken!! I will keep you all posted on my progress.

11<sup>th</sup> November: Did I mention I am a vegetarian, something which birds of prey definitely are not!

We feed our birds a mixture of Quail, Rat and day old chicks, (all dead of course). These are stored in their own freezer, something Tony did not see the reason for until my forceful verbalization that I would not eat anything stored in a freezer full of rats!

So, this vegetarian is sent out to the shed which houses said freezer at some time during the evening, generally after 10pm with an order which might go something like 'one rat, two quail and six chicks' These I have to locate, fumbling around in the depth of a chest freezer and deposit into a plastic container. This container is another one of Tony's loves and comes in the form of a ceiling roller plastic tray. By this I mean that it once held emulsion paint specifically for a ceiling and is sized so that you can use the roller to apply the paint straight out of the container. These, to Tony's delight had tightly fitting lids and were just the right size for his rats etc.



The container still has Dulux plastered all over it and when you have a dead frozen rat with a very sticky up tail, the lid is very difficult to bloody shut. The lid has to be shut tight you see because when they start to thaw they can attract the odd fly or two and the beloved birds would not then be able to eat the contaminated dead rat.

Now, I have managed to overcome my dislike of dead things to such a degree that I can retrieve these offering from the freezer but, when they are thawed!!!!

I have, to this point been unable to persuade myself to pick a dead rat up and cut it with scissors into bird of prey size offerings, ditto the same for the Quail. The chicks are fed entire so not so bad. The rats, once cut have the most appalling smell. As Tony has full use of his upper body I deposit the container of thawed offerings and give him a pair of scissors to do the job. This however does not avoid the fact that someone (me) has to handle said butchered rats and give a piece to each bird. I have armed myself with surgical gloves and am getting extremely good at holding my breath. I might just take up the challenge of how long one can hold ones breathe under water. That's a Guinnesss Book of Records thing isn't it?

12<sup>th</sup> November: We have bought this devise (a supportive frame/ peg leg) to help make Tony more mobile. He is going to get an eye patch, put one of his birds on his shoulder and go around saying "Aye, Jim lad".

15<sup>th</sup> November: As I understand it, if you are a falconer, birds of prey are supposed to sit on your gloved hand and be carried about. Well, I have found it's not that simple. You have these leather things attached to their legs through something called an anklet, quiet self-explanatory that one. These straps are called Jesses. These jesses are connected through slits in the end of each one through something called a swivel. To this swivel you thread a piece of slim rope stuff called a leash. Now when you pick up your bird you catch hold of both jesses (hopefully) and the bird is supposed to step up onto your glove. So far so good, unless you are Arthur and instead of stepping elegantly onto the glove he launches and grips whatever part of the glove he has landed on with an immense pressure. Anyway, I digress. Once the bird has stepped onto your glove you are supposed to do something complicated with the jess bit, wrapping it between fingers and then coil the leash around more fingers, this is called 'safety' although it does not feel very safe when I do it. I am afraid I just grab the jesses, lift the bird off the perch and then wrap the extreme end of the leash around my other hand, thus having hold of said bird with two hands instead of one, seems much safer to me than 'safety' When the bird then launches itself, using my clenched hand like a Harrier jump jet take off platform, I can then calmly ask it to get back on, but they don't. When they decide to take flight, so to speak and they can get no further, they then lose all dignity and hang upside down staring up at me with little beady eyes and, on a lot of occasions, making cackling bird noises. Not, you understand, ferocious swearing like Arthur but more the sort of communication that may perhaps be saying 'Oh .....ck' If a bird does this, you are supposed to take your ungloved hand and gracefully sweep the bird back up onto your glove by putting your hand under its back. I am immensely proud of myself because I can do that but it seems only to facilitate another punch off the launch pad. The Harris's Wilf and Tobias, will do this about six times before I get to the perch where I am to tie them. I therefore deposit an upside down cackling, beady eyed bird on the ground and continue to master tying the 'falconers knot' one handed to secure him to the ring on the perch. Once I have done this I can let go of the leash and he will hop up onto the perch. They always do this ruffling their wings at me as if to say 'I'm ok, that was not a bit undignified, I always lie on my back, it's my thing and I think I look cool like that, OK?' In a later edition, I might tell you about the 'falconers knot'

18<sup>th</sup> November: It's amazing the things you have to do when your husband has his leg in plaster. It's not that I am not capable of doing a lot of them but Tone sees some things as 'man's jobs' and who am I to argue? Anyway, I am trying to see what I am doing in the stone shed (Tony refers to it as The Mews) where the birds are kept at night on their shelf perches. These are semicircular perches that are either close to the floor or, as in the case of 'the mews' they are half way up the wall and have a shelf underneath them so that if the bird is stupid enough to jump off his perch during the night and cannot find a way to get back up, he will be sitting on the shelf instead of hanging upside down.

Anyway, I can't see a bloody thing because one of the fluorescent tubes (yes, we do still have them) has blown and is flickering annoyingly but giving no light. Tony says it might be the starter motor, I thought they only had those in cars, but there you are. He just happens to have one of course so I am sent up a step ladder and told to take the tube out of the holder. This is no mean feat, there are many horror stories of these tubes being dropped and smashing, the contents are a bit toxic I am told. So, I have my head up in the roof joists, I have a miners headlamp (probably known as a joggers headlight nowadays) on my head and am being told by, 'standing on one leg man', how to gently twist the tube to loosen it in the holder. I have to say, I felt like a WWII bomb disposal man, it was all very tense making. Actually, it came away quiet easily and I gingerly climbed down the step ladder and placed it gently on the bench below. I was then sent up the ladder again and told to locate this small white circular thingy which is located in the tube holder. Well, I had my headlamp but not my spectacles. I can't see a bloody thing without them so I had to climb back down, go into the house, find them (not always an easy task) and go back out to 'the mews.' Suitable attired with headlamp and spectacles I climbed once more up into the rafters and located the starter motor and managed to remove it. Tony gave me the new one which I managed to fit without too much fuss. Now back to the bomb disposal mode again whilst I climbed the step ladder with the tube in my hands. I had to get into all sorts of contortions to be able to fix the thing in one end and locate it in the other and twist.

Well, I had done it but was emotionally unable to let go because I thought I might not have located it properly and what was going to happen if I got half way down the step ladder and the thing came crashing down to earth shattering all over the place.

I gave myself a stern talking to and slowly pulled my hands away. By this time, 'standing on one leg man' was getting very tired of it all and had turned the light on. Hey Presto, amazing light flooded 'the mews.' Another success for this budding Falconer, Mews maintenance.

20<sup>th</sup> November: I think I told you I was going to tell you about 'the falconers knot' Well, let me do that.

'The falconers knot' is tied in the end of the leash (the bit attached to the jesses) and secures the bird to his perch. Now, 20yrs or so ago when Tony first started having birds of prey around I think I thought it necessary to show a little interest so got him to show me how to tie it. He very proudly showed me a few times when he was on his initial training course. He would come home with a leash (no bird on the end) and hold one end of this leash in his left hand. This left hand would be held in a fist like position as though he had a bird of prey on it. Actually, I think this might be peculiar to Tony. If you ever ask him something about birds and he starts to tell you stories, as soon as he mentions the bird his left hand has a reflex reaction and adopts the 'bird sitting on hand' position. Anyway, I digress, he would hold the empty end of leash in fisted left hand and the other end he would wrap around one of the spindles in the back of a kitchen chair and proudly show me how he could tie this complicated knot one handed. I used to make appreciative noises and leave it at that. However, as soon as he owned a bird of his own I thought it only fair to show a little wifely interest and ask to learn how to tie this knot. I have, therefore, some time ago managed this feat but not for some time. Now, as you know I have been cast adrift in the Falconry world at the moment and so tying this knot single handed has become imperative. If you are left handed, you hold the bird on your right hand and have a right handed Falconers glove, if you right handed you therefore hold the bird on your left hand and have your right hand free.

It might be very difficult, in the written word to explain this knot but suffice it to say that it exists of loops and ends of leashes pulled through loops, and bird pulled towards you to tighten loops and then do it again so that there is a double 'falconers knot'. On top of this Tony has this fear fueled idea that his particularly intelligent birds will unpick all this so he has me tie a half hitch in the end of the leash too. This half hitch used to be tied after pushing the end of the leash through a tiny hole in the base of the perch. I say 'used' because I have carefully suggested that we try another method. Let me explain. After mastering all the loops and pull backs etc, tying a half hitch in the very end of what is left of the leash is very difficult (one handed). What is more difficult however and very swear making is trying to untie the bloody half hitch after the bird has baited a bit during the day and pulled it tight (baiting, being having a little fly about on the end of his leash) This half hitch presents itself pulled tight like a dried peaS and after shredding my thumb nail down to the quick and having a few birds sighing in disbelief at the length of time I had been squat on the ground in front of them, I suggested that we might tie the half hitch around the ring we tie them too so that it could not be pulled so tight. I had not, for one minute, thought that Tony would buy this idea but so far so good, he agreed and now I at least can untie the half hitch. Now, untying the rest of the bloody 'falconer knot' sometimes is not so easy but I persevere and have some very understanding birds. You will understand that this does not include Angry Arthur.

25<sup>th</sup> November: Apples, now they should not be a problem really should they? Well, let me tell you about the apples that are my problem. Where the birds are perched in the day is either under nice little shed things that go all along the edge of their lawn ( I think these are called weatherings) or they are perched out on the grass itself. This, naturally is dependent on weather. The area of grass that Tony chose years ago when he was designing his bird keeping facilities is in one corner of our rather large garden. There is a large apple tree growing there. The apples are not really that edible, although they look nice, rosie and red. I am sure some gardening boffin would be able to tell us that the tree needs a mulch of carbolic acid and selenium in a ration of 3 to 5 or something but as I don't know that, these nice to look at red apples are not that nice to eat. Anyway, the tree is large and as we had no gales worth mentioning in May, like we did last year, there was masses and masses of blossom. Blossom means apples, so I am led to believe, well that's what they said last year when we did an apple blossom blessing to replace the wassailing that was snowed off the previous year (not here you understand but in a rather nice cider apple orchard) Anyway, no gales, loads of blossom, absolutely tons of apples. What's the problem I hear you saying. Well, let me explain. Apples fall to the ground and rot and go moldy. Mold and birds of prey do not go together. Birds get a condition called Aspergillus, which affects the lungs and this is caused by mold. Birds of prey are very fast flyers and need lungs to pump oxygen fast, not lungs full of mold. So, you see, every bloody apple has to be picked up. Tony does not like to waste things and there is this lovely public house that keeps its own pigs and feed them on things like apples that their customers provide. Our apples get picked up, bagged up and taken to the pub. Now when Tony did this daily I did not even notice. I also did not notice that he disappeared to the pub every now and again. These apples probably pay for a pint or two I expect. You may have noticed that is has been a bit windy lately and there have been tons and tons of these apples falling and having to be picked up. They fall on the roof of the weatherings and I can't reach them all so I have to get a garden rake and scrape them off the roof, they fall between the weatherings and the garden wall so I have to crawl about falling over tree stumps and ferretting around on the ground the find all the apples (mustn't leave any to go moldy you see) This takes a considerable amount of time and when I lie in bed at night and hear all the apples raining down on the weathering roof I am really happy!

My time is taken up doing lots of things. I therefore did not really notice that I was filling up rather a lot of old fertilizer sacks (they are clean) with apples, until, in a rush to get hold of a bucket to go and collect even more apples, I fell over a heap of seven large filled sacks. It was at this stage that I suggested we might visit the pub. Tony was quiet agreeable with this. However, I had not at first realised how bloody heavy each sack was because I had filled them to the top. I had to wheelbarrow them out to the van and lug them in the back. I did manage this but whilst I was driving to the pub I had disturbing thoughts about my loading tactics. I had placed all the back sloping backwards in an attempt to keep the apples in the bags but on considerations I thought if I had to brake quickly they were all going to flip forward and spew apples all over the van. Now, I know you are all thinking that is what happened but it didn't. I got all the bags to the pub without spilling any! After a cheese and onion roll and a little cider I told the landlord that he had to unload the van because I wasn't bloody well lugging them all down his garden path. He was quiet understanding.

Did I mention that leaves rot down and create mold too? The apple tree is very big and has an enormous amount of leaves. Our old sit on mower does a good job of vacuuming them up but yesterday it would not start so I had to rake the bloody lot up. Still, on a brighter note, there are less apples falling this week.

1<sup>st</sup> December: So, I survived the weekend being Falconeress at the Ludlow Castle Medieval Christmas Fayre.

Survived being the operative word because it felt like a battle of the Somme experience.

Our pitch at this epic event is inside the main castle courtyard and you cannot drive the van in over the bridge. You have, therefore, to drag all the equipment on these flat bed, four wheeled trolley affairs. Quiet useful but bloody heavy, particularly as the bridge is uphill!

Friday was set up day and we managed to achieve that reasonable well but just as we had the birds all loaded in their boxes on the trolley to take back to the van after they had been fed, it started to piss down. Neither Tony or I had waterproofs on at this stage and by the time I had managed to get the trolley steadily down the hill which involve me bracing my ass against the handle so the bloody thing would not mow me down, I was very wet indeed and the poor ferrets, who were in a half open ended box were wet and disheveled and paddling around in their shavings.

We sorted that and arrived at the hotel which Tony has stayed in for the last eight years. It changed ownership last year and Tony had already decided that it was now too posh for filthy Falconers but could not get anywhere else to stay this year. They had, after much deliberation about health and safety allowed us to put a camp bed in his small single room for me to sleep on. More later on that! It's funny but when you are completely able bodied you do not clock that the hotel does not have lifts and your room is up two flights of stairs. Tony huffed and crawled up the first flight whilst I dutifully waited on the landing to hand him his crutches to clump along the corridor for the next flight. I then had to hold open a surprisingly heavily sprung fire door that was threatening to snap his crutches in half before we reached the bedroom. Now, the stair carpet was a peculiar mixture of red and dark brown so we did not notice what was happening. The top corridor and our room had beige carpet. I collapsed onto the bed in this small room and watched Tony crutch it across the room and was horrified to see that there was a series of fifty pence sized, but circular, muddy rings following him across the beige carpet. I let out a shriek, ran to the door and looked out and, sure enough there was another trail of the same shapes outside too. His crutches had embedded wet mud in the non slip grooves on the bottom. I am now on my hands and knees with wet bog roll mopping frantically at the mud. After my Mrs. Mophead exercise I then had to take his crutches and immerse them in hot water in the bathroom sink whilst scrubbing frantically into the grooves to remove about a flower bed full of wet mud.

Later, whilst drinking gin and tonic in the bar, I causally mentioned to the girl behind the bar that we would be needing breakfast at 7.30.

"Its 8am" she said

"No, my husband had been staying here for 8 years and you always get him an early breakfast, we have to be at the castle by 8am" I replied

"Its 8am" she said

I was wondering how to get through when she started again

" Breakfast is always at 8a.m. we can't do it any earlier but I could try and get hold of 'im to ask"

I had no idea who 'im' was but she did seem a little in awe of 'im'

Later, she told us that she had not been able to get hold of the staff that come in to tell them to come earlier and she had not been able to contact 'im' either so perhaps if we came down at 7.30, she was sure the cereal would be out and we could start with that and by the time we wanted our cooked breakfast it might be ready.

So, the next morning on this vague promise we arrived down, with the two other guests who had also had 7.30 breakfast for the past eight years, to an empty dining room, no lights on and definitely no breakfast. However, there were two boxes of cereals and a few plates on a side table next to a door that went into the kitchen which had a small glass pane in it, behind which I could see the light on and a woman doing things. I tapped loudly on the glass and her shocked face appeared at the door. I mouthed and shouted that the door was locked and there was no milk out. She mouthed and shouted that 'ee' was not here yet and the door was locked and she could not open in. I gesticulated widely about other ways to access her kitchen and she sent me to the fire escape and round the back. I duly located it and came back with a jug of milk. By this time I was thoroughly cross and decided I did not want any bloody breakfast. The others decided to tuck into cereal whilst I once again negotiated the fire escape to go and tell her that they would all like a full English. On the way round I encountered a man getting out of a rather posh black 4WD who looked astonished to see me appearing from the back kitchen door..... I explained that he had the keys and that we had wanted breakfast at 7.30

"Its 8am" he said

I gave up at this stage, went back up to my room to make myself a cup of coffee and change into my Medieval wench falconeress gear which did not feel at all warm enough for the frost and ominous black clouds that were outside. Once I had added my fox fur cape (yes, I know I'm vegetarian) I was warm enough but the later monsoon conditions proved none of it was waterproof!

By the time I got downstairs Tony had consumed a breakfast and was hobbling towards the van.

The weather all night had been a bit aggressive so the guy ropes and poles were all slack and wonky and the awnings was blowing about in the wind. There was quiet a lot of correction to do and, yes, another slog up the hill with a flatbed trolley full of bird boxes.

I won't go into too much detail about the 14hour day that ensued but, shall we just say it was hell. The winds got up the rains came down and still more and more people came and asked to hold a bird on their hand. I am constantly amazed at the behavior of the public in adverse conditions. Their attitude is that they are here now and whatever the weather does they are going to see everything and that included standing out in the pissing rain to hold one of our birds. We had to ask them to come into the tent and out of the rain because the birds were getting wet. The birds did not seem to mind at all, it was just me that minded and I was on constant 'catch Tony if he falls' watch as he stoically had his peg leg strapped on and was stomping around in the increasingly sticky mud underfoot.

Towards the end of the evening the castle custodian came around with bits of paper she had printed out to give us. It was a gale warning for the night, 75mph winds. The warning was about securing our tents. After much deliberation, we decided to take the poles out of the canopy, leave the guy ropes hooked to their pegs and role the canopy back and place the table and the firebox on top to stop it blowing away.

The birds were heroic and were fed well and boxed back up for the return journey on their trolley to the van. We had given up any idea of cooking our pottage on the fire and decamped to the nearest chippy. We smuggled these upstairs to our clean bedroom and crashed into bed about 11.30. Before going to bed Tony decided he wanted a shower. A friend had lent us a big plastic bag leg thing with a seal around the top so he could keep his plaster dry. I was just settling down when I heard a lot of swearing going on in the bathroom. Thinking he had got stuck in the shower with his crutches I went in to see him attempting to extricate himself from his pants whilst in the shower, he had forgotten to take them off. Once I had recovered from the paroxysm of laughter I was suffering, I managed to get him out of his now soggy knickers. Looking around for what to do with them I noticed a pack of sanitary disposal bags so dropped them in their and sealed the bag so that I was able to pack them in his clothes without getting everything else wet. Very useful I thought. I mentioned I was going to tell you something else about the camp bed. This piece of equipment could only go in one place in the small room and that was on the strip of floor from, the single bed towards the bathroom. Now Tony was on the proper bed, ( only fair I thought, as he had the plaster on) We had tried sleeping in this together but we were far too hot so I slept on the camp bed. The problem occurred when Tony wanted a wee. He had to wake me up so that I could get up, stand the camp bed up against the wardrobe so that he could stomp passed it to the loo, I had a very restful night! I woke up when it was still dark outside and lay listening to rain. I was deliberating whether it was rain or whether I was just imagining it. I could hear that Tony was awake and waited for him to say something, he didn't. So I ventured "Is that rain do you think?"

"I was just thinking the same." he said.

We both lay there in silence until I summoned up the necessary energy to crawl to the window. It was rain, lots of it. Either we were too exhausted to notice or the 75mph winds did not occur in the night but it was windy this morning, perhaps not 75mph though.

We had opted not to try and get breakfast that morning so we went off in the van to find a trolley again to get the birds into the castle. On the way I had, what I can only describe as a brilliant thought. As our canopy was on the ground anyway and there were likely to be high winds during the day that would pull it down if we put it up, why did we not just pack the lot up anyway. After all, under the canopy was all our living history display, fire, table, logs axes, chairs to sit in (fat chance!) etc. Tony is not the easiest person to persuade to change anything in his life so I was a bit unsure of his response. When I suggested it there was a prolonged silence until he too decided it was a brilliant idea. So, we got there put the birds out and set to de-camping everything we possible could to the van. This, naturally, involved a few more flat bed trolley journeys but I was getting the hang of it now, I only ran over myself twice, that morning and managed not to lose anything off the back too, things were looking up.

This is getting to be a long missive so let me just finish by saying that we managed the day, rain and gales and packed up with one trolley load to get finished by 4pm. We were two very relieved people driving away from that castle I can tell you. I only have to survive Dunster by candlelight this weekend now!

3<sup>rd</sup> December: I have become a Squadron Leaderess. I am actually flying these damn birds. I had become increasingly distressed at the thought that these lovely winged creatures (apart from Arthur) were not able to fly around. Tony always flew them every day. So, I suggested we should try and fly them. Birds will fly to you if they are just hungry enough to want to come and collect the Ferrero Rocha that you have clutched in your gloved hand. Their Ferrero Rocha of course is not chocolate but a piece of dead something chopped up.

We decided to start with the wonderful Wilf who is rather forgiving of a Squadron Leaderess's with scant navigation skills. Tony hobbled out and stood at one end of the paddock and I did all the running around getting Wilf to fly from him to me numerous times. I was told repeatedly not to put my hand near the bag that you hang around your body with the pocket in it that contains the dead things. This would be your bare hand (but in my case because of handing the dead things, I did have a surgical glove on it!) You do not want dead things that birds love to eat on your bare hand. I was trying to work out how quickly I could delve into the small chopped up bits of quail deep in the bottom of the bag and pull my hand out to place it on the gloved hand for Wilf to come and retrieve. He is a genius this bird, I think he is omnipresent, he seemed to be with Tony one moment and landing on my shoulder the next because I had not yet put the bit of dead thing in my hand. Now, even I was not daft enough to try and do that whilst he was practicing Harrier jump jet take offs from my shoulder so Tony called him back to give me time to get the stuff out. I got the hang of this quiet well but it was a bit windy. It was surprising to feel the force of the bird landing on the glove as he tried desperately to get the flaps down to land gently with the wind up his ass. We also flew Tobias and it was interesting to see him behaving like a Tiger Moth being slipped streamed sideways to land on the runway in a high wind, these birds are very clever. Right, I thought, I am now getting good at this so let's fly that bastard Arthur (you see I do have charitable thoughts sometimes, I though even he must want to fly) He did but my persona took on more of a rear bomber attitude as he flew toward me. I was bombarding him with all the emotions of a WWII fighter gunner just to keep him in his place. He landed with a mighty thwack most of the time but at least he did not swear profusely at me at the same time. If I keep this up I might even get the hang of it.

7<sup>th</sup> December: Well, I wondered whether to write about this, as it's not really about falconry but then I decided it is, inadvertently. It's about jet washing or power hosing if you like. The ferrets you see, (who do work with the birds), are put out into a run during the day. This run has pipes and plastic tubs in for them to play in. They love it in there but it has got rather dirty so I decided, in my wisdom, that it needed cleaning. I borrowed a jet washer years ago from one of Tony's relatives to do our courtyard so I decided this was just the thing for the ferret run. I dressed myself in my wellies and waterproofs and plugged the thing in and started the advanced attack. I was merrily blasting away with my high pressure jet of water at all the pipes which were hurling themselves around the floor of the pen in an attempt to get away from being clean. I got carried away and was feeling very pleased with the cleaning result until I realized I was ankle deep in water. I was looking around for some sort of drainage hole when Tony stomped on his peg leg around the corner and pointed to a 1cm gap between the wire and the concrete block base. When I registered incredulity at the inadequacy of such a small aperture, Tony said

"Ferrets can get out of the smallest holes, I did not want to risk any escape attempt".

I am now paddling ankle deep in very dark muddy, ferret poo, moss, mud and grime filled water and wondering just what to do when I hit on the idea of getting my dustpan from the house and baling it out. You may have already realised that this was a lengthy and messy procedure. I had to finish it off by dabbing manically at the concrete with a big sponge and ringing it out over the side of the run, all very time consuming and involved quite a lot of swearing. Still, it is now clean and I think Yin and Yang (the ferret's names) will like it very much. The Ying and Yang was derived because they curl up together and look just like the symbol for Yin and Yang.

I did not, however, stop at the ferret run. I have always been a bit obsessive once I start doing something and I decided that the courtyard outside the back door looked very green and slippery and I was worried about Tony slipping on his peg leg. So, I proceeded to blast hell out of this with the jet spray too. Now, once you are occupied looking at the ground and watching in wonder at the flash advert sort of effect one of these things has on dirty paving slabs, you don't immediately notice that the splash back is hitting other areas. By other areas I mean doors, windows and walls. When I stopped for a moment and noticed that the kitchen window, the Perspex sides of the porch, the back door and the outside walls of the house now resembled a field that had been muck spread I was more than a little appalled. My reasoning now took the form that if I could blast the paving slabs, I could blast the doors and windows too. However, it does not really work like that and everything became very messy. I discovered that if I stood back further and let the misty power of water, without so much pressure, hit the windows and doors then it did clean them somewhat. I continued my blasting at ground level for another three hours. Yes, three hours!! I got carried away but then some of that time was attempting to unblock the bloody drain which seemed to be welling up black smelly stuff in the corner of the yard. I reasoned that if I blasted my power jet down into this morass it might unblock it. It didn't but I got very black and smelly in the blowback.

Once Tony had managed to pry the power jet off me and I had taken to bucket and sponge to clean the doors and windows it did all look a lot better. As for myself, well I resembled and smelt like a bog monster and had to take to the shower with alacrity.

Thanks for this hilarious recount Sheila.....we do hope your life is returning to some form of normality.....have a good Christmas! If members are stuck for a Christmas present, how about vouchers for flying a raptor??



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## DIARY DATES

Jan- AGM and auction  
Feb- membership renewal  
Feb 21<sup>st</sup> - dressage @ Woodfield  
Mar 20<sup>th</sup> - dressage @ Woodfield  
Apr 17<sup>th</sup> – dressage Championship @ Woodfield

### Dressage Riders Show Jumpers Eventers

If you would be interested in competing for the club at area competitions, please contact Laura Hayden, Team Co-ordinator.

## Tack Shop Club Member Discounts

Did you know you are entitled to special discounts at local tack shops ? Think of all that money you can save ! Here is a summary of just some of the discounts available and the contact details:

Chris Puddy : <http://puddys.co.uk/saddlery/>  
- Discount 10%

Wadswick Countrystore:  
<http://www.wadswick.co.uk/> - Discount 5%

Patrick Pinkers:  
<http://www.patrickpinker.com/?id=296> –  
Discount 10%

It is also worth asking if you visit other tack shops, remember always take your membership card with you ! Please note these discounts do seem to be rather selective and some items are excluded, unfortunately this includes saddles.

Please keep checking the website for up-to-date news regarding speakers and rallies –

[www.vhprc.co.uk](http://www.vhprc.co.uk)

Any articles/ photos to Ros at [rossteward@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rossteward@hotmail.co.uk)

## Christmas Dressage – some snaps from the December competition



Please send your photos, whatever you do with your equines.....

This was one of the rounds from the Quiz, sent by Linda Knight.....try it out on friends and family!

### Find the Connection Round

1. Richard Nixon's resignation as president in 1974 was linked to which famous scandal which took place two years earlier?  
Answer: Watergate (Waterworks)
2. Phil Daniels featured in which 1994 Blur hit?  
Answer: Park Life (Park Lane)
3. Which is the most Northerly County in England?  
Northumbria (Northumberland Road)
4. Which Elvis Presley Song features in the film of the same name and was the first song to go straight to no 1 in the UK charts?  
Answer: Jailhouse Rock (Go to Jail)
5. What has two limbs, a neck, a grip, a rest and a string?  
Answer: Bow (Bow Street)
6. Your thorax is more commonly known as your what?  
Answer: Chest (Community Chest)
7. What do melons, grapes and cucumbers all have in common?  
Answer: They all grow on vines (Vine Street)
8. In the bible, who was sent to Nazareth to deliver good news to Mary and Joseph?  
Answer: The Angel Gabriel (The Angel Islington)
9. Corporation, consumption and council are all types of what?  
Answer: Tax (Super Tax)
10. What connects these answers?  
Answer: MONOPOLY



## Received from Gill Hutchings.....

My other half had booked and paid for me to have a Land Rover off-Road Driving Experience in Devon at Wessington Farm Awliscombe, Honiton. My expectation was of a tatty old Range Rover or Land Rover slipping and sliding over ruts and banks being taught by a Hill Billy or 2. How wrong I was- we arrived at a lovely farm with a really nice reception, everyone in uniform, lovely friendly staff, hospitality coffee, tea and hot chocolate with chocolate biscuit! Well that was a good start as far as I was concerned!

Then I was introduced to my instructor and after some formalities I was escorted to my lovely new, new Land Rover Discovery! Now years ago I owned such a vehicle but let me tell you this was nothing like my TD5, this was a vehicle packed with gadgets! 5 terrain selection buttons, paddle shift on stirring wheel, cameras on the wheels and on the rear, hydraulics to give extra ground clearance it was a truly fab vehicle! When I negotiated a steep muddy decent I just took my foot off everything and the car literally just did it for me, I did a bank at 33 degrees which seemed practically sideways but was told it would do 45 degrees comfortably, the vehicle comfortably drove through 3/4m of water showing the water level on the camera, no water entered the vehicle & when you opened the doors water drained out of door as vehicle uses the water as ballast, it also had a feature for towing, the camera on the rear lined the car up with the tow hitch and then the camera angle could change so you can see when the tow ball was in place to hitch up then the vehicle hydraulic moved up to connect the trailer, it also had a feature to prevent trailer snaking, anyone who has been unfortunate to experience snaking whilst towing will tell you it's really scary!

My lesson was for an hour which went by far too quickly the only disappointment I had was giving it back!!! What did I truly think of the new Discovery? I loved it, loved it, loved it!!!

All I want for Christmas is  
you darling!

Just kidding.  
Get me horse  
stuff.



Merry  
Christmas

