

Vile Calumnies – March 2009

I think I should have a government bail-out. Not a lot – hardly anything compared to RBS or Jaguar. Half a million would probably cover it, or, tell you what, make it the full million and I promise I'll spend some of it buying a brand new Jag – isn't that what they call a win-win situation? A virtuous circle? (Odd how quickly these buzz words from the boom days have dated.) But why should I get a few barrow loads of taxpayer's cash I hear you cry! Because I am England's last professional gramophone mender. If I go under, where then will the 78 collecting community go to get their record players fixed? The present downturn is clearly only temporary. Well alright, it has been a pretty steady decline since about 1952 when the 45 came in, and then CDs didn't exactly help, never mind digital downloads. But think how environmentally friendly wind-up gramophones are! No batteries, no fossil fuels, and the used needles can be handily recycled when picture framing. They've just completed a brand new steam engine in Darlington, the first one built in 50 years. Can a return to shellac records possibly be far behind?

And then there's Antiques Roadshow. Picture this: a poor old lady has brought her late father's HMV along to show the team. "Well" says that bloke with the bow-tie and the waistcoat, "this is a jolly nice example of an extremely rare machine, I expect you'd like to know what it's worth?" And she's trying to look nonchalant, but we can all see in her eyes she's thinking "cat food, gas bill, chiropodists". "Well" says bow-tie, "if it was in working order this would be worth about £35,000" (cat food, gas bill, chiropodists, grandchildren's tuition fees!) "but as it's not you might as well chuck it in the canal on the way home." Beats there a heart in England so cold that it will not weep for that lady as she goes back to her freezing cold flat to skin the cat for a pair a slippers? Yet this tragedy could so easily be avoided if only there was some kindly, twinkle-eyed, rosy-cheeked, itinerant gramophone mender, always able and willing to help the poor and needy, for a very reasonable fee.

Not moved, huh? Oh well, I'll just have to hang up my precision hammer and seek other work. I've got a few ideas for jobs I could do, perhaps some of you could put in a good word for me.

1. Sainsbury's Hider. Every time you go into Sainsburys everything you want has been moved from where it was to somewhere diagonally opposite up the aisle at the other end of the shop. Do you think that just happens? Do you think the men who come out at night to fill up the shelves just draw out the pallets and shove the contents wherever they can find a space? Or do they arrange the different tins according to how pleasingly the colours work together? Don't be a fool! This is all scientifically worked out! The Hider studies the till receipts, sees what are the most popular items – and moves them. Sometimes the beer is next to the wine, next time it's on the back wall, together with the jam. The other day I went looking for a pair of tights. (Don't ask.) Were they in the section signed 'Women's Clothes'? Of course not, they were in the middle of the shop, next to the toothpaste. Don't try and tell me that's pure chance! That is evidence of a twisted mind at work. And I have just such a mind. After all, I go around buying women's tights.

2. Diversity Awareness Strategy Co-ordinator. Or indeed Diversity Strategy Awareness Co-ordinator. Or any combination of the above. Chuck in 'advisor', 'consultant', and (best of all) 'enabler' and I'll be snug 'til pension time, churning out well meaning blather whilst different groups of immigrants fight each other in the streets as England goes to Hell in a handcart. Got to be worth 50 grand at least.

3. Poet Laureate. Yes, I know I done this one before, but I've written another poem and I've got to shoehorn it in somehow. Recite this in the manner of Stanley Holloway, to get the full effect.

My hen, I declare
Lays eggs that are square
Eight corners conjoined by a ridge
She doesn't half shout
As she's squeezing them out
But you get a lot more in the fridge.

Gis a job!

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