

Clean the wallpaper with stale bread

In 1974 Bramber Parish Council decided to go without street lighting for three days as a saving. Afterwards, the parish treasurer was pleased to announce that, as a result, electricity to the value of £11-59 had been saved.

He added, however, that there was an £18-48 bill for switching the electricity off, and another of £12-00 for switching it on again. It had cost the council £18-89 to spend three days in darkness." — Stephen Pile, *The Book of Heroic Failures*.

THE New Year is traditionally the time for turning over a new leaf, planning to look after the pennies and generally taking a more disciplined view of one's finances. But it is all too easy to go over the top, as the following examples amply demonstrate.

Magazines such as *The Penny Pincher* and a raft of columnists vie to provide money-savings tips in every area of life.

There is nothing wrong with that and no doubt many

Paul Slade looks at some of the more zany suggestions for making domestic economies

people find their help both useful and practical. It has to be said, however, that the advice on offer does sometimes seem to inhabit a parallel universe to our own, entirely untroubled by the demands of real life.

Take, for example, *The Penny Pincher's* recent article on "30 Uses for Old Jeans".

Among its suggestions are: stuffing your laundry into the legs of an old pair of jeans before heading for the launderette; cutting them into strips "to make rope"; and using bits of denim to replace the soles of your slippers.

My favourite, though, is: "Cover a wastepaper basket with a jean leg." Why? Dig a little into the past,

and the tips on offer become even more surreal. Take, for example, Hilary Davies's *Household Hints* which, despite its Victorian tone, was published in 1981.

She has the following tip for those furnishing their homes on a budget: "In the evening when street markets are packing up, collect discarded orange boxes and use them as stacking coffee tables or, hung sideways on the wall, as display shelves."

I rather doubt if Hilary has orange boxes tacked to her own walls, but she evidently thought them quite good enough for her readers.

While you are visiting the market, you may also want to keep an eye out for stale bread, as suggested in Mary Davies' *The Housewife's What's What*. Stale bread, it seems, is an excellent aid to cleaning the wallpaper.

Mary, who must surely be related to Hilary, suggests: "Take part of a loaf of very dry bread and rub the wall gently downwards. Do an arm's length at once, then begin the next piece rather over where the first one ended, so as to leave no blank line in between. Afterwards wipe with a clean towel."

Peckish after all that effort? Mary can help there too. Just soak your stale — and, by now, filthy — loaf in cold milk and water, rebake and "it will come out much fresher".

Mary was writing around the turn of the century. For a handy tip on how to prepare your revitalised bread, we must return to 1981 and *Household Hints*. Hilary has been pondering the vexed question of how economically to prepare three slices of toast when your grill is only big enough for two.

Naturally, she has an answer: "Save time and fuel by grilling as follows (1, 2 and 3 are the pieces of toast; A and B are the two sides): 1A, 2A; 3A, 1B; 2B 3B. This may sound complicated but it isn't."

I hate to rain on Hilary's parade here. But, if life is — as Katherine Whitehorn once remarked in the foreword to Shirley Corfran's 1970s mouldbreaker, *Superwoman* — too short to stuff a mushroom, it is certainly too short to embark on making toast by a method requiring higher mathematics.

Nor does such surreal advice stop at the kitchen. Helen Simpson's 1954 volume, *The Happy Housewife*, turns our attention to the problem of despatching flowers round the country without recourse to Interflora.

She says: "To send flowers by post, the stems should be wrapped in damp cotton wool, and the flowers packed in a box lined with moss."

Yes, that's right, you're going to have to go out and find some moss. And yes, it probably will bring on your lumbago again. But never fear, A C Marshall has the answer in 1937's *The Home Encyclopedia* — just get someone to give your back a rub-over with a really hot iron.

"The iron should be applied over flannel covered with a sheet of brown paper," Marshall thoughtfully adds. He evidently feared that, without that warning, his readers would dismiss anything but direct contact between flesh and burning steel as unduly wimpish.

Other advice I have come across in the past — although, I must confess, I can't remember where — is

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to buy tinned food in bulk from a cash-and-carry, storing it in wardrobes throughout the house, and putting candles in the fridge to make them last longer.

Picture the scene. There you are, your jeans stuffed with dirty laundry, your wastepaper basket snugly encased in denim. A friend, who has just popped round to iron your back is looking forward to a tasty, nutritious, snack of freshly-baked dirty bread.

Only one problem remains. With a fridge full of candles and a wardrobe bulging with tinned food, you have nowhere to keep your clothes.

The answer is obvious — hang them from the orange boxes.