The thing that occurred to me most was our complete reliance on energy; my day-to-day was completely disrupted through the loss of just one piece of infrastructure, albeit one which many others rely on.

With a wood burning and a gas ring I was fine – warm and fed. It was the communication infrastructure that affected me. I couldn’t get in touch with people who may have been concerned, nor with people who I knew might be cold and hungry. Nor did I have any means of getting information about what was going on (no battery powered radio) which made it hard to plan.

I recall the October gales of 1987 – I am sure there was a car driving around with a loud speaker providing information. And, although memories are vague, I am sure ‘social infrastructure’ was stronger – the pathways of information exchange did not rely on social media, electronic communication as they do now. Perhaps there was more talk with neighbours, or perhaps living in a village meant the community was closer. Or maybe we simply weren’t used to such high levels of information – our expectations were lower.

I walked around town on Sunday afternoon and saw there were places open – Robert Gillow, cigarette and alcohol shop. The place I expected to be open and offering information was the Gregson, given its community focus, but that was shut. What made some places open and others not?

The other aspect that struck me was the information that was or wasn’t sent out. As for most things not knowing is what’s difficult. When power was first restored it wasn’t clear it wasn’t mains and therefore unreliable. The uni students were sent home. Staff were told to stay away Monday and come in Tuesday with certainty, as opposed to ‘we think it’ll be fine in the morning but check source x first’. I don’t mean to be critical – it was an unusual situation dealt with well – but am intrigued why the decisions were so different? Is it just because of the H&S risk of those living on campus? Also, systems weren’t working properly – department emails took a day to come through sometimes. That meant one saying ‘don’t come in tomorrow’ came the day later and the day before graduation. Luckily emails came through quickly that day so someone was able to highlight this so staff turned up for graduation. I notice, some people (and generally they are older) always date their emails in the text – a habit coming from letter writing that’s no longer given the generally instantaneous nature of communication now.

My final reflection is that on the news the number of homes without power is often the statistic quoted. However, this doesn’t reflect the impact. Homes, business and institutes without power, no internet for a week, problems restarting systems, no mobile signal etc. The differentiation of having power on -grid and having power off-grid is never mentioned. ‘x’ homes without power and ‘y’ people without mobile signal, internet or ability to get information’ is far more indicative.