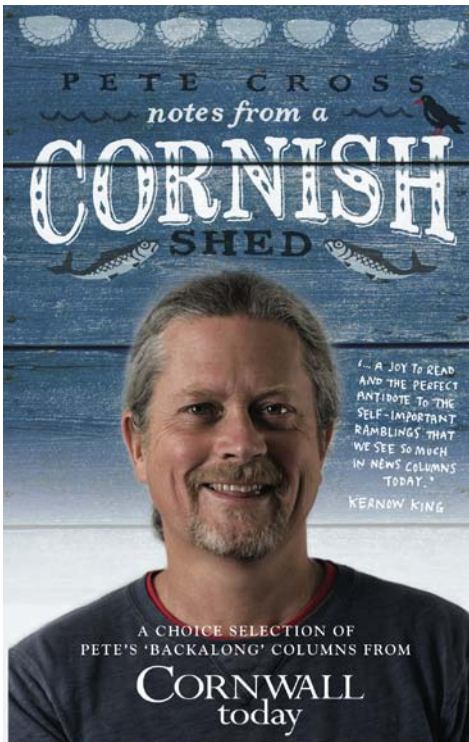


Technofear

2011



Twenty years ago, I thought I was keeping up with technology quite well. I remember buying a CD player, and thinking it was pretty nifty. But things have rather sped up since then, technology wise, and now I feel like I'm drowning in a sea I don't understand. I don't resent the fact that we've all got mobiles and computers and Satnavs; it's just that whenever I try to join in, it never quite seems to work.

There are so many examples. Look at MP3 players (does anyone even know what that stands for?). My wife gave me one of these gizmos for Christmas, but apparently I need a new version of an operating system on my computer before I can even put any music onto the MP3 player. That version will cost twice as much as the MP3 player did in the first place. Funny, no-one mentioned that when she bought it. Then there are digital compact cameras. Sure, taking pictures with one is easy. But the same cannot be said of the baffling number of ways in which you can attempt to produce a photographic print from one.

Our telly was always a bit on the crackly side, but perfectly watchable. Now that it's all gone digital we lose channels for days or weeks at a time. I'm told I need to put a big aerial on the roof, or even a satellite dish, rather than the discreetly hidden one we've got in the attic, but I refuse to bolt such a carbuncle to the top of my pretty old cottage. How dare anyone instruct me to do such a thing?

I've had a mobile phone for a couple of years, and I'll admit it's been quite handy (mostly on trips to London, funnily enough, where there's a phone box on every street corner). But the thing doesn't seem to get a signal wherever I go in Cornwall. And anyway, now that I've got a mobile phone, I realise they aren't phones at all – these days they're internet-browsing, movie-making, lifestyle management systems. These things will rule your whole life if you let them. The mere thought of capitulating to such a machine fills me with dread.

One more thing. I keep hearing ads on the radio for all the wonderful new BBC digital radio stations. But I've noticed they keep quiet about the fact that you can't hear any of them without buying a special new kind of radio.

It's all just so complicated, this 21st century living. Am I the only person who feels this way? Am I that unusual? All this amazing new technology is fine if you want to play along with it. But it all seems like such hard work. You have to pay attention, you have to upgrade things, and change constantly, and buy more and more stuff to sustain it all.

I bought my record player in 1978 and it's never given me a moment's grief, despite being carted around at least a dozen flats and houses. Tekkies might laugh at me, but I don't think having to turn a record over is a huge inconvenience compared with the hoops everyone seems to be jumping through to keep up with technology these days. I would, genuinely, rather go back to a world with no mobiles, no HD, and just a handful of TV channels. And records you played on a record player. And rolls of film you took to Boots.

Of course, we now have a generation of young people for whom this 'enforced future' isn't frightening or alien at all; it's natural, and normal. It's desirable. A record player for them is as laughable as tweeting somebody is to me.

Thank goodness I've got three-year-old children. A ready made IT department. Sometime in the next few years I expect them to start running things around here. I just hope I can make it til then, because at the moment I'm disappearing into a black hole of technofear.

Notes From a Cornish Shed £7.99 paperback, £4.99 e-book, in all good bookshops