

Greenmount – August 2009

Last year at this time, we had just returned from holiday. This year, we could do with one.

Despite a concerted effort to finish the lounge decorating before Jenny's brother, Wilf and his wife, Anne, came for a short stay on 16<sup>th</sup> August, we did not quite make it. The main three walls required an unexpected third coat of paint to cover the previous darker colour and this delayed us one day.

I had to take a day out to cut the grass on the back, front and side and tidy up the back garden in one of the rare dry spells (well, three days) because it was looking decidedly untidy – more so than usual.

So, with all the painting done, the vertical blinds refitted and most of the new skirting cut, ready for fixing, we cleaned and polished the furniture and put most of it back in place before collecting our guests from Sheffield late on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

On Monday the 17<sup>th</sup> we went to Bygone Times, a large antiques emporium at Ecclestone. We went to look for a mirror to mount above the mantelpiece in the lounge and came back with some additions to the obsolete Marks and Spencer Harvest pottery we use on a day-to-day basis, a cast-iron log holder for the lounge and a pot, phrenology head for Rachel. It makes you think, doesn't it? On reflection, we didn't find a mirror.

Monday evening saw the Heavy Thinkers quiz team resurrected in The Bull's Head, scoring 21 out of 25 and my personal best of three pints of strong ale and a double malt whisky. The winning team managed 24 points, so they must have stayed sober.

The 19<sup>th</sup> was a nice day here. Unfortunately we (or rather I) had planned a day up in the Lake District, or, to be more precise, Keswick in the very north of the National Park. With rain spreading from the north west, this was not the best choice of locale. Still, we had packed the waterproof clothing and I had great hopes of finding a decent, woollen, polo-neck sweater and a pair of sheepskin moccasin slippers (size 8 - the size will become significant later).

Woollen (as opposed to a wool and man-made fibre mix) polo-neck sweaters are as much like rocking-horse droppings in Keswick as they are here. Not one of the outdoor shops (as abundant as chip shops in Blackpool) had any at all. Neither was there any sign of sheepskin moccasins. And this is traditionally sheep country.

So if anyone can lay their hands on a pair of soft-soled, sheepskin, moccasin slippers, I would be very grateful. I told you the size would become important. Incidentally, my chest size is 44 inches or large and **woollen** sweaters start life on sheep, not in a chemical plant.

Feeling peckish from our trudging round in the persistent rain, we found some "Traditional Tea Rooms" for a late lunch.

The tea room at Bryson's turned out to be more like a dining room. The waitress service was as fast as a British train in autumn (by way of explanation for those not familiar with traction theory, the friction coefficient of wet, decaying leaves approaches zero) and when the ham sandwich Wilf had ordered did arrive, it turned out to be pork.

When it came time to pay, I was asked if everything had been alright and I said it had except for the pork sandwich being substituted for the ham. The result was that I was not charged for one of the sandwiches, which made the cost of the meal for four somewhat more reasonable. Brysons of Keswick has not made it into my top ten of tea rooms.

On Thursday we went to John Lewis in Cheadle, again in search of a mirror for the lounge. We came back empty handed but with a list of items we could do with acquiring, including a new bed, not, I hasten to add, for the lounge.

The evening afforded us another opportunity to visit Sheffield, taking Anne and Wilf home. Normally, the journey takes between one and a half to two hours each way. On this occasion, we were held up in a two hour traffic jam on the end of the M67 at Mottram on the way there and diverted along the A-roads, through Stalybridge and Ashton-Under-Lyne on the way back. That was a long day.

While on the subject of the M67, it beats me why the highways and byways department of our wonderful transport ministry should design a motorway that goes nowhere and stops abruptly, channelling three lanes of traffic travelling at up to 70 miles per hour into an ordinary, single-carriageway A-road with a speed limit of 60 miles per hour that lasts about a quarter of a mile before entering Mottram village at 30 miles per hour and encountering a busy, traffic-light-controlled cross-roads. This is the kind of thinking that took the Great out of Britain. Bring back the Romans is all I can say.

As I understand it, the plan was to build an extension to the motorway, bypassing the villages of Mottram, Hollingworth and so on but rumour has it that there were objections to the planned route through the beautiful Longdendale valley and this gave the department of transport the excuse they needed not to go ahead with the scheme without having to admit they had run out of funding.

The sensible approach at the time would have been to use the old railway line, the old Woodhead Tunnel and sweep the M67 all the way round to join the M1. Now, an even more sensible approach would be to reopen the Woodhead railway link to Sheffield with a reliable and cheap train service but that isn't going to happen unless some really sensible people, like railway enthusiasts, take over the running of the British rail network.

Today, the Longdendale Trail (the old railway line) is a cycle route and the Woodhead Tunnel is just sitting there, closed off at both ends. Opening that up to cyclists is far too good an idea for the powers that be to consider it.

Back to reality.

Our guests having departed, work on the lounge has resumed, although not with the same sense of urgency.

We have, at last, lit our new fire on a several cool evenings. This is very useful since I still have to paint and refit the lounge, central-heating radiator.

Unfortunately, lighting the new fire is not as easy as I expected it to be. The instructions, which I followed to the letter, explain that the stove door should be closed and both vents in the door fully open until the fire is established and then the bottom vent should be closed, adjusting the upper vent to control the burn rate. This is an excellent technique for filling the lounge with smoke.

I have now burnt the instructions and devised my own strategy for lighting the fire, which is to leave the door slightly open until the fire is burning and then to close the door, leaving both vents fully open for a good hour before controlling the burn rate using the lower vent. This only produces a ver small amount of escaping smoke.

I had forgotten how dirty and smelly old fashioned fires can be. I had also forgotten how much warmer they make the room.

You may recall I mentioned I had replaced the bathroom toilet seat after sitting on it and breaking it. I subsequently sent an E-mail to Ideal Standard (aka Armitage Shanks), the manufacturers, based in Hull, complaining about the toilet seat and they have very generously sent me a cheque that far more than covers the cost of replacement. What an excellent result from a British Company. What else would you expect from Yorkshire folk?

I have been watching a series of walks in the Lake District, devised by a chap called Alfred Wainwright and presented by Julia Bradbury. One series covered the Coast to Coast walk from St. Bee's Head in the north west to Robin Hood's Bay in Yorkshire. I have recorded all six episodes and put them onto a DVD. Having watched the series a couple of times, I would dearly like to attempt the walk, although I know I am not fit enough to do so at the present.

Another problem is the logistics of personal hygiene. Since the walk will take me several weeks to complete, with frequent breaks in the various villages and towns en route, it is important to have changes of clothing if one is to retain one's friends. The quantity of clothing required for the whole excursion is too bulky and heavy to fit into a rucksack, especially when one is constantly climbing and descending high peaks.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle is the weather. The walk passes through the wettest part of the country in the early stages and, while there are magnificent views, one needs a fine day to reap the benefit. It is also dangerous on the high fells in bad weather and poor visibility. What is more, the stretch in north Yorkshire passes over a peat moor and I can tell you from experience that peat, when wet, is not the firmest of supports. I still have the brown stains on one leg to prove it.

Of course, when I was younger, such trifles were not even considered and I shudder to think of the weather conditions in which I have walked over the high peaks of Derbyshire with equally insane friends for company.

The Bank Holiday (Monday 31<sup>st</sup>) was Jenny's last day of freedom and September sees the start of a new school year of crossing patrol duty and a new term of Beaver activities. We spent the day, as we had the previous two, helping with the jumble sale at The Old School. The income is much needed to pay for the new boilers and for the removal of all the old asbestos insulation. A long, memorable week end indeed.