

Greenmount – August 2014

Our usual Friday shop on 1st August did not get off to a good start. We were up late and there was a traffic jam on Brandlesholme Road, a few minutes after leaving home. I decided to turn the car round go through Tottington instead.

Another traffic jam on the M60 led me to believe it was going to one of those days. I was right. There was another queue on the M60 on the way home.

I managed to put the week's TV recordings into Jenny's lap top and Matt came after tea, bearing gifts from his and Carrie's recent holiday in the Pyrenees. Matthew had tried his hand on a potter's wheel and had made me a lovely, hand-engraved pot for drinking beer/water. He also brought some wine and a hand-made pot for Jenny. Carrie was not with him because she was out with friends.

On Saturday 2nd August Jenny, Edith and I went round to the monthly drop-in at the Old School. Jenny and I minded the DVD stall for Frank and Gwen while they went for some lunch. Afterwards, I provided some unscheduled entertainment, lying full-length, face-down on the floor of the hall, trying to catch a mouse that had, seemingly, made the Old School its home. After several attempts to trap it in an old cake tin, I succeeded and, at Andrew's suggestion, I released the poor creature in the grass by the Kirklees Trail, just down Brandlesholme Road, on the opposite side.

I spent the rest of the day planning our New Zealand trip.

There was still no communication from Keith and Angela in New Zealand on Sunday 3rd August, which I found frustrating. I was unable to book any accommodation for our trip until we had confirmation of a few details from them since they were to be our initial point of contact on arrival.

I received an E-mail from them the following day, Monday 4th August and spent the day planning and booking accommodation at various locations.

I took a day off on Tuesday 5th August to sample the delights of Ramsbottom. Edith had booked an eye test to check on her remaining cataract, having had one eye operated upon in New Zealand and my new glasses were ready for collection. We lunched at Baileys Tea Rooms. I have to say it was quite expensive and not as good as it used to be. Neither did they have any gluten-free sandwiches.

I took another day off on Wednesday 6th August and we went for a wander round Bury. We had lunch at The Trackside and I, unwisely, had the Chilli-con-Carne. Not that it wasn't good; it was very nice indeed. Unfortunately, my digestive system, being what it is rather than what it should (or used to) be, objected most strongly to the spices for the following day or two. The only disappointment was that The Trackside could not offer any gluten-free food for Jenny.

I spent much of Thursday 7th August tidying up the back garden, the rain taking a turn to have a day off.

It amazed me how quickly another grocery shopping day had come round on Friday 8th August. What was even more amazing is to where all the food (and drink) went from the previous Friday. At least this experience was not as time-consuming as the previous one.

I was back to refining our plans for our trip to New Zealand on Saturday 9th August.

We went down to visit Matthew and Carrie on Sunday 10th August so that Edith could see their house and we could talk about the wedding and their holiday, this being the first opportunity we had following these two events. They had a wonderful time and Matthew was of the opinion he could live near where they stayed, running a B&B. We booked in for the first two weeks.

Having failed to find anyone to repair the glass in the door of my wood burning stove, I decided to tackle the job myself on Monday 11th August. The Stovax manual said that removal of the old glass was a simple case of undoing four screws, each of which held a metal clip in place. The chap who wrote the manual should have tried it. The screws simply would not budge, even with gentle persuasion from a chisel and a hammer.

The only method I could think to effect the removal of the old glass was to drill out the old screws. In three of the four cases, that worked quite well, except that there was no sign of the thread on the inside of the hole, into which it would be necessary to place new screws with new clips on the new glass. That was all somewhat academic since the drill on the fourth hole not only removed the screw but went straight through the door, thereby providing an unintended vent for smoke into the room. Up to that point, I had contemplated re-tapping the thread in the holes. Afterwards, I contemplated completely replacing the door.

Our neighbour across the back, Sylvia, had mentioned to Jenny earlier in the day that she had an old computer she no longer wanted and had asked if I wanted it for the car boot sale. I went round to look at it and, being a Yorkshireman (known for never refusing owt for nowt), Sylvia gave me a lift back with it

I installed it in the conservatory (where else?) on the coffee table and it loaded up Windows XP. Interestingly, it had the previous owner's data (not Sylvia's data, since she had been given it and never used it) on it and I immediately deleted the old users and their personal information. It was an old computer with only 256 Mb RAM, a 2.2 GHz Celeron processor and a 40 Gb hard drive, so, by current standards, not worth a lot but at least it worked and, let's face it, you wouldn't get a modern Microsoft Windows operating system running happily in 256 Mb. Bring back XP, I say.

On Tuesday 12th August, it was Jenny's turn to go to the opticians (The Spectacle Studio, Ramsbottom) and Edith's turn to visit the local hair dresser (Lisa Chestney).

I dropped the ladies in Ramsbottom at the opticians, giving Edith an opportunity to potter round the shops while Jenny went for her eye test. I went on to Burning Desire at the Stubbins Cuba Industrial Estate, from which we purchased our wood-burning stove, to order a new door, for which they needed the serial number, not the sort of

thing you carry with you. I said I would find it and telephone later.

The plan was to collect the two ladies after Jenny had finished at the opticians and bring Edith back to Greenmount for her hair appointment. Unfortunately, the optician was running a little late and the appointment took longer than I expected, so I had to shuttle back to Greenmount and then return to Ramsbottom to collect Jenny. The timing was perfect. Jenny had just paid the bill.

Returning to Greenmount, I arrived at the hair salon just as Edith had finished. Perfect timing again. I was on a roll.

We came home for lunch. No, not another roll.

I telephoned Housing Units of Hollingwood about the lat supports on our king-sized bed we had purchased from the shop in 2010. Several of the plastic centre supports had perished and crumbled. They said they would contact the supplier and have replacements posted to me.

I eventually found the serial number for the stove on a pull-out plate underneath the front and telephoned Burning Desire with the information.

We went to Sheffield on Wednesday 13th August to meet up with Ann and Trevor for lunch at Le Bistro in Wentworth and then to go on to see Jean and Harry at their home again. We called to see Reuben and Linda in Penistone on the way in but they were not at home, so we left a note with the cat.

We met Ann and Trevor at Wentworth and had another excellent meal at Le Bistro. We had a long talk with Jean and Harry and learnt a lot more about the family. I didn't remember much about Jean and Ann's younger days, when I was about four or five years old, only what my mum had told me.

On the way home we called in to see Wilf and Anne and, having had such a large lunch, we did not stop on the way home for tea. In any case, it was quite late when we arrived home and we reflected on having had a most enjoyable, long day.

The new lat supports for the bed arrived on Thursday 14th August so I thought I would spend ten minutes replacing those. The job took about an hour. Most of the old centre supports crumbled as I tried to remove them, leaving the two studs that held each of them in place in the holes in the frame. The majority of these I managed to prise out by unscrewing them. There is always the odd one or two isn't there?

I made a quick dash downstairs, into the garage, for my toolbox. I finally managed to remove the last couple using a sharp probe and a little gentle persuasion, not wishing to damage the frame.

Meanwhile, Jenny was holding up the large mattress we had tipped over the end of the bed.

Having removed the old lat supports completely, it was necessary to vacuum up all the bits off the carpet under the bed, which meant hauling the vacuum cleaner up the

stairs.

Finally, there was a fair amount of dust on the frame between where the wooden lats had been, these now unceremoniously piled on the floor by the side of the bed. Another trip downstairs retrieved the polish and a duster.

By this time, Jenny's back and arms were beginning to ache just a little.

Inserting the wooden lats into the new supports and fixing these into the holes in the frame was not as easy as it sounds and that took me much longer than I expected. I did manage to speed up a little as I perfected the operation.

In the middle of this process, Burning Desire telephoned to say the new stove door had arrived and I arranged to collect it the following day.

We finally heaved the mattress back into place and made the bed into which we were both ready to collapse.

I tidied up and prepared for our outing to the vet in Bury to take the cats for their annual check-up and vaccination.

What interesting lives we lead.

Treacle, our black and white cat, was fine, except for being a little overweight and needing a couple of her claws clipping, something on which we shall have to keep an eye.

Toffee had lost a lot of weight and had a very high heart rate. The vet suspected a thyroid problem and felt her thyroid, in which he found a small lump. He suggested she might have a small tumour and that she should have a blood test, costing £60. I pointed out we had been offered a senior cat blood screen for £49 if we ordered it at the time of the check-up and we arranged that. I also asked about the tumour and the vet said if there was one, it was almost certainly benign, which came as a great relief. He said he would telephone us the following Monday or Tuesday with the results of the blood test and to discuss any treatment options if required.

Our weekly grocery shop on Friday 15th August turned out to be something of a marathon. The first stop was the bank in Ramsbottom for Edith to acquire some cash and I dropped the ladies there while I went, once again, to Burning Desire, this time to collect the new door for the stove.

Having picked up the ladies (I don't normally crawl round Ramsbottom picking up ladies, you understand), we headed for the M66 and Asda at Pilsworth for essential supplies.

Stocked up with wine, we made for Unicorn in Chorlton and then Waitrose in Broadheath as usual, lunching at the latter.

We were back home before 4 p.m., having left earlier than usual at 9:30 a.m. and I fixed the new door on the stove, which literally did take five minutes.

After tea, we went to a folk evening at Helmsore Textile Museum, listening to a group called Trouble At' Mill. The evening was most entertaining, with a mixture of songs, some I knew from The Fivepenny Piece and a couple of their own. Pendle Hill featured quite prominently, as it does.

There was a meat and potato pie supper in the interval, with cheese and onion pie for those who preferred it and a gluten-free meat and potato pie portion for Jenny (preferences were ordered at the time of booking).

What's more, the café now offers a range of gluten-free sandwiches.

The first task on Saturday 16th August was to update this record of events and to check the weather forecast. No rain was forecast until later that evening which made a nice change! After that it was a case of tidying round and preparing for the return of our two antipodean guests.

We collected Amy and Tor from the airport about 10:00 p.m. and the timing was perfect. As we walked into the arrival area of Terminal 1, Amy and Tor appeared from the arrivals gate. The ten minute parking spot cost me £2.90 and I couldn't get the machine to accept my debit card. Luckily I had enough cash.

I spent most of Sunday 17th August updating my and the village web sites, not that I had planned to do so. I expected it to be a ten minute job but it was more complicated than I expected, not that it mattered, because it was a day of nice, warm sunshine and heavy showers.

On Monday 18th we all went to Bury for a look round. I bought Jenny a halogen, bedside lamp to help her with reading her books in bed and, while in British Home Stores, she spied a couple of tops and a pair of pyjamas she liked. One of the tops and the pyjamas were not available in her size and I thought I had got off lightly until she ordered them at the counter, for which they required pre-payment.

We lunched at the rather expensive but excellent Leckenbys before making our way to the vet to collect a pack that would allow me (I get all the good jobs) to collect a urine sample from Toffee. The pack comprised some non-adsorbent, plastic granules to put in her litter tray so that she had something in which to "dig", a plastic pipette to siphon off the liquid and a tube with stopper in which to place the sample. Fancy getting all this for just a few quid.

After the inevitable stop at Tesco, we made our way to Tottington, where Amy visited The Robin Hood, Carmellos, The Dungeon and the Café Turin to enquire about casual bar work and/or waitressing. All four took her details, which sounded hopeful.

On Tuesday 19th, Amy contacted the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) to enquire about progress with her nursing registration, for which she had applied in the previous December so she could work as a nurse in England. They finally got round to telling her that she was short of 100 hours of clinical practice in her degree from New Zealand and could not register even though she had a post graduate degree and three years of experience in Brisbane working as a theatre nurse. How stupid can you

get? A lot more, seemingly. The NMC had, to our knowledge, told two other young ladies who attended the same course and did the same clinical training as Amy that they were short of 35 hours and 7 hours of clinical practice respectively. The NMC obviously employs a random number generator.

I immediately wrote to my MP, David Nuttall explaining this was not the first time over-zealous bureaucracy had stood in the way of professionals from NZ; a similar failure to recognise my niece's teaching qualification, even though she had been an excellent school principal (head-teacher) for several years in NZ, prevented her from registering with the local authority as a teacher and she only managed to obtain work, eventually, as a teacher through an agency.

Carrie, who works in PR for the NHS, suggested Amy should contact the Royal College of Nursing to see if they could help.

Jenny Tor and I went on a cycle ride down the Kirklees Trail as far as the new bridge and back while Amy went up to Tottington to pursue her casual work applications.

The lady at Café Turin Amy had arranged to meet was not there.

Jenny made Amy a nice jam and cream sponge cake to cheer her up.

I had received a very nice reply from David Nuttall MP and I passed it on to Amy.

It was time to set up the cat's litter tray in the conservatory on Wednesday 20th August and Toffee was not happy at being confined. She was determined not to part with any urine and had not done so by the time we retired for the night, having left the heating on in the, by then, cold conservatory.

Meanwhile, being a reasonable sort of day, I had managed to cut the grass on the back and front lawns.

I gave Amy and Tor a lift to Bury to meet Matt and Carrie for a meal at 5 p.m. In the evening, Jenny went to discuss Beaver Scouts with the new Friday Colony Beaver Leader, Ann-Marie. That left Edith and me alone at home to watch the first two episodes of A History of Jazz, a four DVD box-set by Ken Burns that Jenny bought me on the condition that I only watched it when she was not there. Edith loved it and said she would like a copy but, alas, it was no longer in production.

I was up at 5 a.m on Thursday 21st August to check on Toffee. She had, at last used her litter tray and produced the urine of which I needed a sample for the vet. Fumbling about, half asleep, I managed to syphon the sample into a test tube using the kit provided for this purpose, seal the tube and wrap it in kitchen roll before placing it in the fridge to keep it as fresh as possible. Then I went back to bed, hoping that nobody would mistake it for anything other than what it was.

I didn't really get back to sleep because I had to be up again at 6:30 to take Amy and Tor to Bury to catch a tram into Manchester at about 8 a.m. so they could catch the bus to London at 9 a.m. The somewhat complicated plan was for them to meet up with some friends, hire a camper-van, drive up to Leeds for a music festival for the

weekend, drive back to London and return the camper-van. Tor was then flying off to Spain for a week's tour and Amy, after making face-to-face (or blow-to-blow) contact with someone from the NMC, was catching the train back to Manchester on the following Tuesday.

After Jenny had risen and had a late breakfast, Jenny, Edith and I went to Bury to deliver the cat's sample for analysis. The vet's practice was unexpectedly closed and when I telephoned the number on my mobile, it was diverted to the Radcliffe branch. Apparently, they didn't have a vet to cover the Bury practice and had to close it for the afternoon. I took the sample to Radcliffe.

On returning, Edith telephoned the doctor with whom she was registered (Minden Family Practices, Bury) to make an appointment the following week because she needed a prescription for some tablets she took regularly. Edith was told that she could not be seen by the practice because she lived outside their area, that the registration was a mistake and that she would have to register with a practice nearer her home address (i.e. our house). I took it that was assuming she lived long enough to do so without her medication. I had never experienced such abysmal, unprofessional, uncaring and unhelpful treatment from a health professional.

I received an E-mail from Matthew and Carrie with a link to a You-Tube video of the highlights of their wedding:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glzCYKVXYhE&feature=youtu.be>

and promptly added this to my Picture Gallery on my web site:

http://www.networking-consultancy.com/index_files/picture_gallery_index_2.htm

The vet telephoned in the early evening to give us the not-so-good news about the cat. Toffee had a slight thyroid problem which needed treating with tablets. More worrying was a kidney problem and the first step was a course of antibiotics, followed by a repeat urine analysis (oh, joy) and, in about three weeks' time, another blood test. I could see this was going to get expensive.

The evening did end on a rare positive note; Edith had finally managed to arrange travel insurance for her return trip to New Zealand.

Rachel arrived as we were having breakfast on Friday 22nd August, having dropped off her car for its annual MOT test. She stayed with the cats while we went foraging for food and, of course, lunch at Waitrose (or, in Jenny's case, in the car, on the way from Unicorn to Waitrose because Waitrose had no gluten-free food available).

We returned home just in time for me to give Rachel a lift up to Tottington to collect her car.

While we had been out, Steve had called on Skype from Australia and we discovered Angela had kindly forwarded Edith's latest post from NZ.

I relaxed, drank a bottle of chilled, organic beer from the pot Matthew had brought me

back from his school trip to Prague many years ago and updated this account of the previous week's activities.

Saturday 23rd August was the start of a 3-day marathon at the Old School, sorting, testing and pricing electrical equipment for the jumble sale on Monday 25th August.

The little space we had was very cramped and there was not enough room or time to deal with everything that had been donated. Even so, we had quite a few decent, higher-priced items and our takings exceeded all previous records, as did the overall total taken on the day.

It is amazing how much is donated to the Old School and, thanks to those who give us goods, those who buy them and the army of volunteers who freely give their time, we continue to operate the Old School as a community centre, undertaking repairs and renovations as necessary to both that and to the church to which it belongs. The community, co-operative spirit that exists here in Greenmount is a rarity in these modern times of greed and selfishness and is something, I think, that is more reminiscent of that which must have existed in many communities during the war years, sixty years ago and which is sadly lacking in many communities today, where it is a case of every one for themselves.

Jenny and I went to Rachel's flat after we had dropped Edith off at the Bury Walk-in Centre on Tuesday 26th August.

Edith was going to try to see a doctor at the Walk-in Centre to acquire the prescription for her tablets that she urgently needed, since the Minden Family Practice had seemingly disowned her after we had received the confirmation of registration.

Meanwhile, my first task was to install an electricity monitor for Rachel so that she could keep an eye on how much electricity she was using. This worked on the principal that a magnetic clip on the live wire between the meter and the fuse box detected the amount of electricity flowing and a transmitter sent this information wirelessly to a receiver that displayed the usage. The first stumbling-block was that I required some AA batteries for the transmitter and receiver and didn't have any. This turned out to be somewhat academic when I discovered all the wiring was inside the wall and inaccessible.

The next job was to give Jenny a hand. She had started a second attempt to clean the washer and she hadn't made much progress because she couldn't get it to power on. After a thorough investigation and a few choice words, neither could I.

I turned my attention to fixing some shades to the ceiling lights in the lounge. Jenny had bought the shades from the jumble sale at the Old School. Unfortunately, she had bought shades for table-lamps, not ceiling lamps.

I did manage to put the battery back in the smoke alarm. I had removed the battery on an earlier occasion to stop the smoke alarm going off every time the oven door was opened but that didn't work because the alarm was, seemingly, wired into an electrical circuit. The battery seemed superfluous but the battery holder would not close without a battery in it. Strange, I thought. Rachel's solution was not to use the oven.

I could not put up the pictures Rachel wanted on the wall because Jenny had forgotten to tell me she needed some picture hooks and I could not lubricate the stiff windows with WD40 because she had forgotten to ask me to bring that as well.

All in all, it was not a terribly successful day.

When we arrived home, Edith greeted us with her tale of equal failure. The Walk-in Centre didn't want to know either.

I later compiled and sent a letter complaining about our caring NHS Primary Care Services to the appropriate authority.

On Wednesday 27th August the first task was for me to take Edith round to the Greenmount Medical Centre to try to sort out her immediate need for medication. In the absence of the practice manager, an extremely helpful receptionist not only registered Edith as a temporary patient but also arranged for an appointment with a very nice, lady doctor while we were there and she gave Edith the prescription she required for a month, requesting that Edith return in two weeks if she required a repeat prescription. Meanwhile, the receptionist had asked us to return the following week to see the practice manager when she returned from leave.

Setting off somewhat later than planned for our day trip to York, we (Jenny, Edith, Rachel and I) arrived at the Askham Bar Park and Ride facility in just over an hour and spent the day wandering round the narrow streets of York. We lunched at Bailey's Tea Rooms and it was warm enough for afternoon tea and cakes outside at the gluten-free cupcake shop before making our way back to the car.

We had an evening meal at The Beefeater at Heaton Park. Three of us enjoyed a nicely-cooked fillet steak. Edith's flat-iron steak, which had been very good on the previous occasion, was so inedible that even our cat, to which we gave the remaining half of it Edith had not even tried to eat, refused it. We did complain and Edith received a token, free sweet but on reflection, I should simply have refused to pay for it.

Amy was working at the Monkey House in Silver Street in Bury from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. and Edith and I went down to collect her when she had finished. She had arranged to work Friday and Saturday from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. We discussed options for Amy getting home at that time in the morning and the favourite seemed to be a pushbike.

On Thursday 28th August we awoke somewhat later than on recent days to a nice, sunny morning. That didn't last long.

I busied myself updating the village web site, which took me up to lunch time, with a brief break to help fetch in the washing Jenny had just pegged out before the rain started. Meanwhile, Jenny spent the morning ironing, not a task she particularly enjoyed.

Amy had made some progress the previous day and in the morning with her nursing registration and had found a two-week training course that suggested it would give

her the clinical training she needed to satisfy the NMC. That was the good news. The bad news was that it would cost £1400. It seems that you can achieve anything in this country if you're prepared to pay for it. If all you've got is practical experience, well, that's another matter entirely.

I spent much of the afternoon repairing and cleaning Rachel's bicycle ready for Amy to use. It did see the light of day recently when Tor rode it down the "Lines" and she said the rear gear change was not working properly. Removing the cover from the gear change and giving it a good clean and squirt with WD40 seemed to fix the problem. I also oiled the chain and wiped the cogs with an oily rag and cleaned the bits of the frame I could access easily with WD40. I even managed to find the old light set, get it working and fix it to the bike. What a versatile chap I am.

Friday 29th August was another shopping day. Amy remained at home for an appointment at the hair salon.

The outward journey was uneventful except for a 50 m.p.h. speed limit for most of the way on the M60 anticlockwise from Prestwich. Apart from the hard shoulder being coned off, there was no obvious reason for the reduced limit and if this was a ploy by the petro-chemical industry to boost sales or a strategy of the government to increase the revenue from fuel taxation on the expectation that motorists would consume more fuel as a result, I've got some bad news for them. Instead of managing around 60 m.p.g., the car averaged nearly 75 m.p.g.

The return journey was, sadly a different story, with traffic reduced to a speed not exceeding 10 m.p.h. with long periods idling on the handbrake. I left the M60 at Prestwich and the congestion had not improved. I had no idea why traffic was moving so slowly.

Having left home about 10:30, we did not arrive back home until turned 5 p.m., following a brief visit to Asda at Pilsworth and an even briefer one to Tesco to satisfy the car's urgent need for liquid sustenance.

Was my day over, you might ask. No it wasn't. An hour's rest and a cup of tea and I was heading for Bury again to give Amy a lift to Automatic where she was meeting Matthew and Carrie for a meal. From there she was going to work at The Monkey House until the early hours.

I was about to retire at midnight when Edith reminded me Amy hadn't taken a key. Oh dear (or words to that effect), I thought. I came down just after 2 a.m. to let in Amy who had taken a taxi home.

I tidied up the lounge a bit before John, Jane and Laura arrived just after 12:30 on Saturday 30th August and we all went for an acceptable lunch at the Red Lion, Hawkshaw, a J W Lees pub. We came back for a cup of tea cake and a chat before they departed about 5:30 p.m.

The next task on Jenny's list was to pack the car for the following day's trading at the car boot sale in Ramsbottom, the weather forecast being good.

Amy had been working a late shift again and was not in her bed when we woke at 5 a.m. In preparation for the car boot sale. I was somewhat concerned and contacted Matt to find out if she had gone back to his house. He said not and shortly afterwards, Amy sent a message to say she had been working later than expected, stayed for a couple of drinks and was about to share a taxi home with the bar owner. I was quite relieved to know she was safe.

We arrived at our pitch at Ramsbottom Station Car Park about 6:45 a.m. on Sunday 31st August, having risen before the sun, to light drizzle, at 5 a.m. I set up the two tables and assembled the clothes rack before taking the car off to a separate car park in case I needed it. Normally it would be parked behind our stall but it would then be impossible to take it anywhere should it be necessary to use it. Stating that the public conveniences were not unlocked until 9:30 a.m. should make clear the potential urgency for transport back home.

Trading was slow and steady and we packed up about 2:30 p.m., as the sunny morning, having chased away the rain, had given way to fairly dense cloud once more.

At home, I was surprised to discover, on counting our takings, that we had done reasonably well.

I spent the rest of the day recovering and most of the evening trying to discover why Windows 7 on Jenny's lap top kept blue-screening. All the evidence seemed to suggest that it was caused by the USB wireless mouse and keyboard and disconnecting this seemed to cure the problem. I concluded that, either the drivers were corrupt in some way or that the hardware was faulty. Since I relied on the laptop for recording TV programmes, I decided not to investigate further until I had more time.

And so ended another exciting month of life in that small corner of the universe that is, for now, Greenmount.