

Greenmount – December 2012

Saturday 1st December was the commencement of Christmas for us and the first task of the day was to fetch the tree and trimmings down from the garage loft. That done, we had to work out where to put it. Answers on a Christmas card, please. We decided to rearrange the lounge furniture a little and placed the erected tree to the left of the hearth, in front of the door to the dining room. It is fortunate we have an alternative route to the latter via the hall and kitchen, otherwise we would be taking weight off this Christmas instead of putting it on.

We left the decoration of the tree to Rachel, while we went off to an evening of live entertainment at the Cricket Club. It was a folk night with a Lancashire theme to celebrate Lancashire Day and, although Yorkshire folk, we buried the roses and joined in the festivities. Considering the Dearden family probably originated from Lancashire in the first place, having a foot in both camps seems to be a good idea.

We attended Church Parade on Sunday 2nd December, this being a Toy Service, where the children of Greenmount donate gifts for the poorer children of Salford.

On Monday 3rd December I joined the other merry lads for a breakfast planning meeting at Summerseat Garden Centre. On returning, Jenny and I went into Ramsbottom to buy some Christmas cards from the charity shops and generally browse round. Our first port of call was the Santander bank where Jenny deposited some cash in her car boot fund. I was browsing a brochure on investments and, following a brief conversation with the cashier, ended up spending an hour talking to a more senior member of staff, the result of which was converting our current account to the new 123 account, signing up for a 123 credit card to accompany my zero credit card and an appointment with a financial adviser in January.

After lunch at Bailey's Tea Rooms, we arrived back home just in time for me to dash with my meeting with the chap from Bury Council on Brandlesholme Road to discuss the placing of our village rock sign. By the time I arrived, ten minutes late, the business was just about concluded and I was allocated the project management role. It serves me right for arriving late.

Tuesday 4th December was a sort of non-descript day, so I shan't go to great lengths to describe it. It was a case of generally pottering about the house, doing a bit of tidying here and there, mainly there.

On Wednesday 5th December Jenny gave the four merry lads a lift to the tram station in Bury as we made our way to Macclesfield, courtesy of the Manchester Metrolink and Northern Rail, paying in full for our transportation (a) because we started our journey before 09:30 and (b) because Macclesfield is outside the Greater Manchester area covered by our national travel passes (except for Steve who isn't yet eligible for one).

We walked the Macclesfield Canal from Macclesfield (surprise, surprise) to Rose Hill, Marple, about 11 miles or so, with a stop for a very nice luncheon at the Miner's Arms at Higher Poynton. We tested the local ale at the Railway, Rose Hill at the end of the walk and before staggering onto the train for the return journey. They had a very nice brew on tap called Tom and Berry – did I mention this is a Robinson's pub?

Meanwhile, Jenny had her hair done at the local salon, Cream.

It's a hard life.

On Thursday 6th December we decided to do our grocery shop since I was due at the Eye Clinic at Fairfield General Hospital the following morning. After calling at the tip in Bury to dump a boot full of rubbish, we went to Unicorn in Chorlton and then Tesco in Prestwich, where we lunched at Costa Coffee. The staff in the latter establishment have come to know us quite well by now from our fairly regular Friday visits and I had to remind them this was Thursday.

Worthy of note is that we were informed the new manager of the meat department has decided not to stock any more supplies of organic produce. We shan't be shopping there again, Mr Tesco and you can whistle goodbye to our substantial contribution to your coffers.

My appointment at the Eye Clinic on Friday 7th December went more or less as expected. The earlier time of 9:20 meant that parking was easier, using the first car park on the left on entering the hospital grounds and that I had to wait to see a consultant for a much shorter time. The five minute consultation confirmed that the sight in my right eye had improved considerably and my next appointment was scheduled six month's hence.

Jenny had to drive from the hospital to Asda at Pilsworth because my pupils had been dilated and my eyes were about six inches in front of my glasses. Needless to say this was another grocery shopping opportunity for items we didn't know we needed.

We returned home with our goods and almost immediately departed again for lunch at Summerseat Garden Centre.

And so ended another tiring week.

On Saturday 8th December, Jenny and Rachel went to the Trafford Centre for a general browse and some Christmas shopping. I don't particularly like the place much. There are dozens of clothes shops, mostly selling items I wouldn't give away, for more money than the people who make them are likely to see in a lifetime. I've seen better items in charity shops at a fraction of the cost. Whatever happened to quality and good taste? Then again, if you're reading this....

I stayed at home, enjoying myself, washing pots, emptying and cleaning the recycling bins and cleaning and laying the fire for the evening.

I was in church at 11:15 on Sunday 9th December, just after the service had finished, helping with the preparation for the Christingle service, later in the day. That took about an hour.

We were all back in church at 3:45 p.m. for the service itself, for which I had swapped my tattered old clothes and overalls for more appropriate attire and my Scout Fellowship sweatshirt, neckerchief and woggle. "Did anyone notice the difference?" I ask. I positioned myself in the balcony to take pictures of the service, while Rick, a Scout Leader, took pictures in the stalls.

Monday 10th December saw the regular breakfast meeting of the intrepid travellers at the Summerseat Garden Centre while Jenny remained at home baking five dozen mince pies. That's what I call division of labour.

On Tuesday 11th December, the lounge had a bit of a spruce-up and a set of Christmas lights appeared around the mirror in the entrance hall to add to the festivities. Later in the afternoon, we ventured out on the bus to Bury and met up with Rachel after work to do some shopping. Rachel gave us a lift back home in her car and I became a back-seat driver.

After tea, we settled down to watch recorded TV programmes. A piece of one of my lower-left, front teeth fell off in all this excitement. Fortunately, it did not cause me any pain other than the discomfort of having grade zero sand-paper rubbed against the inside of my lip.

On Wednesday 12th December, I was out walking along the Rochdale Canal with the chaps from Littleborough to Mills Hill. The day started misty and cold. The mist soon cleared and the sun shone in a blue sky as the temperature dropped. Much of the canal was frozen over and on one occasion, I slipped backwards down a cobbled incline leading up from the canal. I had visions of an early and cold bath as I was caught by Mike, behind me and who just managed to keep both of us on dry land. Being unable to find a pub that served food close to the canal in Middleton, we settled for a rather shoddy-looking café. Happily, the food was pleasantly acceptable, the service was very good and prices were very reasonable.

At the end of our walk we found a very nice J. W. Lees pub serving some excellent ale.

Much of Thursday 13th December was spent catching up on Beaver documentation.

On Friday 14th December, I went to see the dentist about my tooth, which was fixed in minutes as she applied white filling to the chasm on the outside of the offending peg and smoothed it off. From there, we motored down the road to the post office to send off our Christmas cards and then on to Unicorn in Chorlton and Tesco in Bury for our groceries, lunching at Costa Coffee in the latter.

Jenny and Rachel went off to the Trafford Centre on Saturday 15th December and I set up the TV recordings for the week. I started to feel unwell and didn't do much else. After tea, Jenny went to help out at the local Carol Concert at the Church. It had been my intention to join the congregation but I felt too poorly and spent the evening watching movies instead.

On Sunday 16th December we went for a meal at Automatic in Bury with Matthew, Carrie and Carrie's parents, Marie and Bob. Rachel gave us a lift into town and Bob and Marie gave us a lift back home so this was one of those rare, family, social occasions when I was able to enjoy a drink or two as well as the food.

I was supposed to be meeting up with the lads at Frank's house at 8 a.m. on Monday 17th December to walk from Manchester, along the Rochdale Canal to Mills Hill. I set my alarm clock for 6:30 a.m. but forgot to activate it. Not sleeping very well due to catarrh, congestion and a cough, I woke at about a quarter to five and decided to try to catch a bit more sleep before the alarm went off. Except it didn't. The next I knew was a call at five past eight from

Mike asking where I was. "Wrapped up warm in bed," I told him. Which is probably just as well.

It rained off and on all day and had I been out in it, I would have been both cold and wet and my affliction would have been several times worse. Moreover, my new, black, brogue, leather shoes I have hardly worn and used the previous day had rubbed a nasty blister on the back of my left heel.

I stayed put until about ten, showered and had a leisurely breakfast, reflecting on my mistake and good fortune.

I didn't really feel like doing much, so I didn't, except for turning on the heating to try to keep warm.

Jenny went to help run the Beaver party from 5 to 6:30 p.m. and Rachel, in the absence of Peter, the Friday Cub leader, was helping to run the Cub party from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

I was still coughing and spluttering on Tuesday 18th December and woke the household, if not the whole estate, by 7:30 a.m., which is probably just as well because Jenny wanted to be up early anyway. She and Rachel went off to the Trafford Centre and in the process, Rachel gave me a lift to Bury to do a bit of grocery shopping and to buy some replacement sealant for the bath after I have removed the existing, mould-ridden filler.

My trip met with a degree of success and I guess one must be thankful for that. Mind you, I would have been even more grateful for a higher level of achievement.

The Health Food Shop had three bottles of the organic Cranberry Juice of which I wanted only two and a packet of the organic cereal flakes containing Buckwheat I wanted. They didn't have any Geo organic Balti Curry paste though. Another potentially positive note was that when I told them I had managed to obtain the Granovita organic brown sauce from a shop in York, the lady in the shop said she would try to obtain some, appreciating that York was a long way to go for a bottle of sauce.

Another blow was that the bathroom shop was closed on Tuesdays. Then I had to wait 20 minutes for a bus back to Greenmount.

There was more progress at home. After several days of trying to contact someone about my faulty dehumidifier, I finally managed to exchange E-mails with a chap at Provic, the manufacturer and, being helpful, he contacted the original supplier for me, told them to talk to me, having so far ignored my messages (that's dehumidifiersuk.com aka aircon247.com) and he has authorised them to replace the unit or to refund my money.

Furthermore, I managed to contact Paul Davies, the company that supplied my fitted kitchen five years ago, about the broken hinges in one of my top-cupboards and a lady there said she would ask their kitchen designer to contact me the following day.

I also managed to order another bulk supply of pillar candles for one of our floor-standing candle-holders in the dining room. We tend to use candles in the evening rather than the

electricity (a) because they give a warmer, softer light, (b) because it's cheaper and (c) because, being a Yorkshire man, I'm careful with money. Some might even say miserly. Did I hear a cry of "Surely not!?" No, I thought not.

Back on my feet, I washed the pots for the second time in the day, put away the Christmas decoration boxes that had been cluttering up the kitchen for over a week and tightened up the handle on one of the saucepans.

Then I sat down to reflect on what must have been the most productive day of the year. Jenny went out with the girls for a meal and probably looked upon the day's events in a similar vein.

Following another restless night and late start, we didn't do much on Wednesday 19th December. My cough was no better and I was feeling rough.

After stroking the cat and washing the pots (not at the same time), the latter being a regular occurrence, we placed an order for groceries with Abel and Cole, to be delivered, as usual, on Friday morning. I was then given the task of progressing the repair on the old set of Christmas lights I had earlier consigned to the bin, thinking them to be beyond salvation. That done, as far as possible for the present, I turned my attention to following up the faulty dehumidifier and the replacement hinges for the kitchen top cupboard.

Not surprisingly, no-one from Dehumifiersuk.com/aircon247.com (they are essentially the same company based in Stockport) had contact me so I telephoned them. I spoke to Rob, who denied all knowledge of any E-mails from Provic, the manufacturer of the faulty unit. He promised to call me back in an hour and by 5:30 p.m. I was still waiting. I'm just thankful he is a salesperson and not an ambulance driver.

By lunchtime, I had not had a call from Paul Davies, the company in Bolton that had supplied my fitted kitchen, as promised the previous day, about replacement hinges for one of my top-cupboards so I telephoned them again. A lady said she would have a chat with their designer and ask him to call me. That's what she said the last time. On this occasion, she did telephone me back to say he wasn't in and he would call me the following day.

The candles from scentedcandleshop.com arrived by UPS and I unpacked them and checked them. One of the twenty pillar candles was cracked and I let the company know. Since they gave me such good service on the previous occasion, more than making up for the damaged candles, I told them that I wasn't too bothered about it. It doesn't look as though the crack will affect its use and afterwards, no-one will be any the wiser anyway.

We gave the fridge a good clean and I was called upon to dismantle various elements of it that Jenny didn't even know came apart. Putting them back together was a bit of a challenge though, but I managed it without any bits left over.

We had planned a brief trip out but I didn't feel up to it and the recycling bins needed emptying, a job I was about to do before it started pouring down and which I thought could wait for another day.

On Thursday 20th December, I crawled out of bed at 8:30, having spent most of the night coughing and continuing to do so.

Feeling too tired to do anything physical, I deployed my mental powers, such as they are, to having another look at a long-standing technical fault on my Windows 2003 Server. Not wishing to bore anyone with the details, I discovered that Microsoft had issued a “hot fix” solution to the problem about which I had made some rather uncomplimentary comments many months ago along the lines of testing software before it is released on unsuspecting users. I applied the patch, as it is called and, amazingly, it worked. My only criticism of Microsoft now is that they could have told me the fix was available.

I managed to summon enough strength to go out in the pouring rain and put the brown bin (that’s the one containing leaves, grass, food waste, etc.) out for the collection the following day. It is emptied every two weeks and I forgot about it on the last two occasions, so you can imagine how full it was. It was also very heavy, probably due to the day I left the lid up in the pouring rain.

The chap from the Paul Davies kitchen centre in Bolton telephoned about the hinges I needed and said he would order them for me but they would not be available until after Christmas, which was not a problem. He also said he would pop along and fit them for me, which I thought was very nice of him. I hope Rob Hannan at dehumidifiersuk.com/aircon247.com is taking note.

The other productive activity was to complete a DVD cover for “Above Us the Waves”, a DVD that was issued as a free accessory with a newspaper and which we acquired. The original container was a cardboard replica and I replaced it with a proper DVD case.

My cough not having improved and my breathing being difficult, I retired with three crushed cloves of garlic in a small dish by my bedside while chewing a fourth. Raw garlic has a warm (to say the least) effect on the internals, a bit like malt whiskey. The flavour is somewhat different though. Nonetheless, this did the trick and I had my best night’s sleep for about a week.

Our grocery order from Abel and Cole arrived early on Friday 21st December, minus two packs of three, all-butter, organic croissants for which we had been charged.

We set off later than usual on our grocery-shopping expedition to Unicorn, the delay being caused by an irresistible urge to wash the pots from the previous evening meal and breakfast.

From Unicorn in Chorlton, we made our way back up the motorway to Asda at Pilsworth, where, amongst the other groceries we found, we purchased one of the organic turkeys we were told a few weeks’ previously the store was not going to stock. Was this a figment of our imagination, a result of a tear in the space-time continuum that should have resulted in the end of the world at 11:11 GMT, according to the Mayan prophecy or a case of incorrect information from an Asda employee?

The plan was to bring our shopping home, lunch and go to Tesco in Bury for the items we still required. Two out of three isn’t bad.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent relaxing and I managed to produce another DVD cover while Jenny prepared tea.

On Saturday 22nd December, we completed our trio of supermarket visits for the week.

I telephoned the chap at dehumidifiersuk.com and he said he would sort out my faulty unit in the New Year. I didn't intend to hold my breath. He asked me to telephone him again in January.

After lunch, which included yet more raw garlic, putting me in a much better position to hold my breath should I need to do so, I returned to my DVD library and producing another cover for a DVD previously housed in a CD case.

We took Rachel into Manchester for an overnight function and returned home to tea for two, cooked by one followed by an evening viewing recorded episodes of the first series of Call the Midwife.

On Sunday 23rd December we had the pleasure of collecting Rachel from Manchester and giving a lift home to her friend who lives in the opposite direction. Finding our way to Burnage from the centre of Manchester proved to be something of a challenge, my not having my A to Z with me, it being a long time since I toured the suburbs of Manchester, visiting local hospitals and NHS offices and Rachel's friend not being too aware of directions. Between us, we managed to find her friend's home and, with somewhat greater ease, our way back through Manchester, home.

On Monday 24th December, we went into Ramsbottom for the usual potter round. We would have walked in and caught the bus back but time was pressing and we decided to take the car, having a couple of calls to make on the way.

Sadly we missed the Watchnight Service at the Church because I was still feeling quite poorly and tired.

Tuesday 25th December was a quiet one with just the three of us at home. We held the present-opening ceremony after a late breakfast and I went off with Rachel to Matthew's house to make sure their cat was enjoying Christmas on its own while Jenny cooked the traditional turkey dinner. We spent the evening playing board games, something that has become a tradition on Christmas Day.

On Wednesday 26th December, Jenny and I went for a walk along the Kirklees Trail down to Tesco in Bury. The day had started off sunny and had clouded over by the time we set off. As we approached Bury it had started to rain, not unexpectedly and we had a late, light, free lunch at Costa Coffee using our loyalty points. Given the deteriorating conditions, we decided, like many other people, to try for a bus back home to Greenmount, without success. The only busses running appeared, in order of frequency, to be going to Manchester, Bolton, Rochdale and Middleton. Having deduced there was no public transport in our homeward direction, we resorted to telephoning Rachel to come and collect us. It seemed that many people were left stranded in Bury despite the shops being open for business.

On Thursday 27th December Frank telephoned to ask me if I fancied a pint in the pub about 12 o'clock. I said I would make it if I could and promptly did. I collected Mike and we were propping up the bar as Frank arrived. Steve joined us later, having been on the village Christmas walk, something in which we had intended to participate but didn't get up early enough to do and which we thought would have been very muddy after the recent downpours. Judging by the state of Steve, we were right. The intention was to have a swift drink and be back home in about an hour. How time flies. The clock was striking four as I stepped over the threshold.

On Friday 28th December we performed our usual grocery shop at Unicorn and Tesco Bury. The motorway was very busy, largely with Christmas shoppers trying to get to the Trafford Centre. Lunch was, as usual, at Costa Coffee in Bury, after which I attempted to obtain some organic items from the health food shop in Bury market and some silicon sealant from the plumbers. That was a complete waste of time.

The health food shop had only one bottle of cranberry juice, no cereal containing buckwheat, no Geo Balti curry paste (not that we needed any, having purchased some from Abel and Cole) and no Granovita brown sauce. The lady in the shop would not accept payment for the one item by debit card because it was under £5 and I had no cash with me so I left empty handed. Her stance was not unreasonable, although I did point out that had she had the items I wanted in stock, she would have taken a lot more than £5 from me.

On to the plumbers. The shop was closed for the festive season and would reopen on 2nd January.

It beats me how some people stay in business.

On Saturday 29th December we went up to Redcar to visit my sister Barbara who had recently moved there. All her family were there, except for Julie's husband, Keith, who was working and it was very nice to see everyone together. I took some pictures of the occasion. We also received a couple of unexpected presents, as everyone exchanged gifts and felt a little guilty at not having brought some with us.

Barbara received a couple of gifts of tools, which John and I put to good use, ably assisted by John's son, David and Andy. I installed two light fittings while John erected a bathroom corner shelf.

The drive there would have been shorter had I taken the M1 exit north off the M62 instead of missing it and going onto the A1 junction. The A19 seemed a bit like the A14, going on for ever. The drive back was much more straightforward and we made it in about two and a quarter hours. For some inexplicable reason, the fuel consumption on the return journey was much higher and, as a result we had to refuel at Birch Services, paying an extortionate price. Its high time motorway services were regulated in their pricing and brought back down to some semblance of reality.

On Sunday 30th we did very little, psyching ourselves up for New Year's Eve. The most adventurous activity I pursued was to clean and lay the log fire. Not that we use it much this time of year.

And so to the last day of the year. The day was one of cleaning and tidying in preparation for the evening. Frank and Gwen arrived about 8 p.m. and stayed until after 1 a.m. We were chatting, eating and drinking and I let in the New Year, first-footing with the traditional piece of wood and piece of coal. All the other people we had asked were busy elsewhere. So it was a quiet evening compared to previous ones.

We finally retired about 2 a.m.

A Happy New Year to all of you reading this and may 2013 bring all those things you need, particularly if you didn't get them in 2012.