

Greenmount – February 2007

I am pleased to say that the car passed its first MOT and has been taxed for another year. It is obviously fitter than am I.

The local village pub, within easy crawling distance of our front door, has recently changed hands and what was a Brewer's Fare is now a Toby Carvery. The external décor leaves something to be desired, deviating from the traditional white walls with black borders and beams. We had an invitation to sample its delights at a preview evening on Saturday 3rd February and went for a meal with a couple, Mike and Lorna, who live just down the road. I have to say the meal was very nice indeed, even though the food isn't, as far as I know, organic and I recommend it.

The unusually warm weather, bright sunshine and blue skies tempted me out into the garden and I have tidied up the borders round the back lawn, including the cats' latrine. Unfortunately, the cloudless skies mean cold frosty nights but I suppose you can't have it all ways – at least, not until global warming kicks in properly.

Our dishwasher has developed an interesting fault after less than two years. There is no text in the display, so we can use it but we have no idea what it is doing. I first contacted AEG in Germany for advice but none was forthcoming. I then managed to contact the UK service centre and was told it would cost me £58 for a call-out, with parts and labour at an additional cost. I decided to save the £58 and take the thing to bits myself. Having remove the faulty part, I went to the local repair unit in Bolton, only to be told they do not stock spares and I had to telephone the service centre. After waiting on the telephone for about fifteen minutes, a lady finally identified the part I need and told me it would be £168. I told her I could buy a new dishwasher for that and where on her person to fit the LCD panel.

To vent my frustration, I send some feedback to the AEG UK web site, suggesting, amongst other things, that they should compare their service charges with those of Dyson. The three service calls on our Dyson washer and the one on the Dyson vacuum cleaner have not cost us a penny, even for spare parts and we do not have a maintenance contract. As if to add insult to injury, the site feedback "Submit" button did not work.

So AEG Deutschland received a broadside. I suppose this is the only way they can get their own back for losing twice in succession.

Anyway, the intention of this hard-luck story is not to solicit a donation for a new dishwasher, but to dissuade you from considering the purchase of AEG (including Electrolux) products and perhaps to convince you to relate this warning about the reliability of AEG appliances to others.

On a happier note, I have upgraded my computer, yet again. While it was in bits, I took the opportunity to fit the new cooling fan to the Northbridge chip on the motherboard. I have had the replacement for several months, ever since the old one failed but I never bothered fitting it, until now, because the work is so fiddly. I have added another Gigabyte of memory, kindly donated by Matthew, taking it to 2 GB and added a sixth 250 Gb disc to store movies.

Matthew has performed a major upgrade on his PC, hence the spare memory, in preparation for the installation of his free copy of Vista, which is coming direct from Microsoft. Lucky swine!

To add insult to injury, he has now installed and configured Cisco Call Manager (a computer-based telephone system to replace the old telephone exchange) himself at work, so he will not require the consultancy I expected to come my way. He has obtained some help from his supplier with the installation and configuration of Cisco Unity Unified Messaging (a voice-mail system, linked to the new telephone system and to Microsoft Outlook, so voice messages appear as electronic mail as well as being recorded on the messaging system).

Having seen a news item on a petition in the UK against the introduction of road toll charges, I have found the government web page and signed up to it. For those of you resident in the UK who wish to add their signature to the growing list, here is the web link <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/notolls/>. You might also want to pass this on to friends and colleagues.

On a technical note, those of you who wish to read Microsoft Word documents but can't afford the extortionate price for the software can obtain a Microsoft Word viewer for free from <http://www.microsoft.com/office/000/viewers.asp>. Having already subsidised Bill Gates, I have not visited this site and you may find viewers for other Microsoft products there. I shall not dwell on the acquisition of software from dubious sources.

I have resumed the task of digging up my ancestors, in the virtual sense, not the physical one. I have located my father's parents and his siblings. I am in the process of tracing their families to the present day as well as my brother's family. This is not as easy as it sounds. The web site www.findmypast.com is pretty useless, especially since it charges for searches of the same information that are free at www.ancestry.co.uk. The latter site is very useful and this, coupled with a small investment in searches at the official UK 1901 census site and a fair amount of help from the Sheffield Registrar's office has made good progress possible.

I am intending to produce a CD-ROM holding the latest information during the Easter break so if any family members would like a copy, please E-mail me a request and I shall ship one out to you.