

Greenmount – February 2015

Jenny wanted to go and take a look at the table-top sale at Helmshore Textile Museum on Sunday 1st February, to see what we had missed, all the tables being booked by the time we decided we wanted one.

We could not park our car on the premises because there was an outdoor Farmers' Market in progress, this being the first Sunday of the month, so we had to find a spot along the road and walk back in the lovely sunshine and freezing temperature, along the icy footpath.

We found a market stall selling organic, wild venison steaks and made a mental note of it, as well as this written one, for future reference.

The indoor sale, for which we had to pay a 50p each entrance fee, was somewhat disappointing and we were quite pleased that we had not managed to book a table after all. Some of the stall-holders remarked that it may have been better had it been advertised as a table-top sale instead of a jumble sale and I was of the opinion that the car park would be an excellent location for a car-boot sale when the weather improved.

Jenny and I enjoyed the delights of the early-morning traffic heading into Manchester on Monday 2nd February to meet Rachel outside her apartment. The plan was to discuss her tenancy agreement renewal, or, rather, lack of it, with the letting agent at V Property management on Deansgate. Having walked up and down the far end of Deansgate and across the roundabout onto Chester Road and back looking for the offices of V property Management, we finally found them hidden away on the short part of Deansgate that veered off the main road, only to discover the offices were closed for the day, being used by the film crew for Coronation Street.

Rachel telephoned the letting agent, who said what he always said and never did, that he would deal with the agreement in a couple of days.

Jenny and I returned with Rachel to her apartment, collected our car and attempted to drive to the Trafford Centre along the streets of Manchester, using our trusty A to Z. That was not as easy as it sounded and, after a couple of wrong turns and backtracking, we managed to reach our destination.

The intention was to look for a floor lamp in John Lewis that Jenny could use for reading and I thought I might get one for my chair in the lounge too. Our first stop was the café for a tea and a snack. No free teas there (John Lewis also owned Waitrose).

We found a very nice LED lamp in John Lewis that looked perfect, until we checked the price. It was £220. We left empty-handed, resolving to look for a cheaper one on the Internet.

Jenny still needed a pair of good all-weather gloves and we thought we'd try the outdoor shops in the Trafford Centre. There was only one, North Face, and they only sold their own brand. We left there bare-handed.

We decided to come home and we called at Tesco in Bury for a few groceries, including two six-packs of Highland Spring water, which made a change from buying wine.

Following a late lunch at home, I spent the rest of the afternoon updating my web site and the village web site.

We had the pleasure of Rachel's company that evening and Jenny went off to the new six-week Belly Dancing course at the Old School. A chap needs some entertainment when there's nothing on TV.

The plan on Tuesday 3rd February was to clean the car, which was covered in salt and grime from the winter months. It was a nice day, the sun was shining, the sky was blue and it was barely above zero degrees. Unfortunately, my plan had not catered for the unexpected, as Mike arrived for a chat. Two coffees and a couple of hours later, Mike was on his way and it was almost time for lunch.

It was another afternoon of web site updates, being too late to start on the car.

I did manage to check the Internet for floor-standing lamps and I could not find one as nice as the one at John Lewis. Neither could I find any other stockist of the Clarke lamp sold by John Lewis and manufactured in Sweden.

Wednesday morning, 4th February, was almost a re-run of the previous day. Mike arrived again, just as I was about to wash the pots before starting on the car, to give me a copy of the Old School's BT bill so I could pursue a broadband connection.

Afterwards, it was too late to start on the car as I had to be at Fairfield General Hospital for an ultrasound scan at 1:20 p.m. and I had to arrive with a full bladder. Three guesses as to what parts they were going to scan.

Jenny and I arrived at the hospital in good time and I had consumed about half a litre of water (it makes a change from beer) in preparation. Fortunately, I was processed early. The initial scan was of my urinary tract and bladder. The second scan was a repeat of the first but with an empty bladder (or as empty as I could get it), and they threw in a thorough check of my kidneys for good measure.

The third scan was interesting. That was to check the swelling in my delicate parts, confirming the GP's diagnosis of fluid where it shouldn't be.

The whole examination took about half an hour and was not unpleasant, the challenge having been to hold on to half a litre of water for so long. On leaving, I had some idea of how pregnant women must feel.

We came home for a quick lunch and, afterwards, yet more PC work. I resolved to wash the car the following day.

And so I did. I spent most of Thursday 5th February giving the car a long-needed wash, vacuuming the inside, scrubbing the front, rubber, floor mats, pumping up the tyres and

topping up the screen wash. It was not a bad day, much warmer than of late, with the sun trying to push through the cloud cover but not quite making it and it was pleasant being out in the fresh air and not feeling cold for a change.

On our way out to Unicorn and Waitrose on Friday 6th February, we called at Matthew's house. He was working from home and preparing for his two-week holiday with Carrie and their friends, Chris and Heather, in Mexico, starting on Sunday.

We spent Saturday 7th February at the Old School testing and pricing electrical equipment for the forthcoming jumble sale again, or, at least I did. Jenny pottered round the stalls at the drop-in and then nipped out to see Frank's wife, Gwen, at home while I carried on, managing to slice a nasty cut just above the nail on my left thumb. Jenny was back in time to put a plaster on it from the First Aid box and stop the flow of blood. We did not manage to get back home until 5 p.m., making it quite a long day.

Sunday 8th February was, for me, a bit of a lazy day and I spent a good deal of it listening to a four-box set of Jazz CDs Frank had given to me at the Drop-in the previous day. The arrangement was that if I didn't like them, I could give them back, otherwise I would add them to the list of items for which I owe the jumble sale.

Jenny and I did go out in the freezing fog for about an hour to deliver the latest village newsletter we had collected the previous day. That was after lunch and after Jenny had washed the bed linen, only to discover the washer had some rather undesirable deposits, mainly in the soap-tray and it needed a good clean, after which she washed the bed linen again. In the words of Flanders and Swann, "It All Makes Work for the Working Man (or, in this case, Woman) to Do".

I had intended to resume work on the small bedroom (remember that?) on Monday 9th February, until Jenny suggested walking into Ramsbottom for the usual tour of the charity shops and the inevitable visit to Tesco. We caught the bus back for a late lunch at home.

By mid afternoon, Jenny was feeling the cold and suggested I clean out the fire from the previous evening's use, lay it and light it. By 5 p.m., at which time the central heating was set to switch on, the fire had only raised the temperature to 18.5 degrees, so the central heating kicked in, the thermostat being set to 21 degrees. It wasn't long before the combination of the fire and the central heating had warmed the house to a comfortable level and the fire took overall control for the rest of the evening, Jenny managing to pile on enough logs to keep it going while we were both out, Jenny at her belly dancing class and me at a meeting of the village committee.

Tuesday 10th February would have been the day that I finally resumed the work on the bedroom, had it not been for a rallying call for the Incredible Edible gang to muster forth and commence work on phase 3, which was clearing the side of the path opposite the fruit and vegetable beds ready for some stone walling, back-filling with top-soil and seeding with wild flowers in time for spring. A good deal of raking, digging and groaning and a couple of trips to the tip later, I was back home for a late lunch, only to discover that the garage door would not open for me to put the wheel-barrow and tools back in the garage.

It was a case of crawling in the garage loft to power the electricity supply to the garage door off and then on again, a task I deferred until my lunch had settled and I had made some long-needed modifications to my web-site picture gallery. This was the tip of an html iceberg and I completed about 5% of the outstanding work before I got bored with the repetitive process, not that online viewers of my picture gallery would notice any difference, assuming I had not made any mistakes.

We had a day out on Wednesday 11th February, collecting Jenny's laptop from PC World and dumping the rest of the Old School jumble sale rubbish at the tip, followed by a foray into the indoor Bury market and the inevitable stop at Tesco. What excitement!

Jenny went out for lunch to Summerseat Garden Centre with Gwen on Thursday 12th February and I had most of the day to myself to play with Jenny's laptop, reinstalling Windows 7 and all the software needed. Progress was not exactly speedy, the number of updates to the operating system from Microsoft being considerable. The whole process was to take most of another week.

Friday 13th February was, once again, our weekly grocery shopping day and the first day on which the free tea/coffee in the Waitrose Café was not so unless an item of food was purchased at the same time. Under normal circumstances that would not have been an issue. Since Jenny has succumbed to gluten intolerance and, despite repeated requests, Waitrose has not yet seen fit to provide gluten-free food in their café, we ended up paying for Jenny's cuppa.

We had made an early start, to be back in good time to inspect the table layout for our electrical goods at the coming jumble sale in the Old School and to bring up from the cellar all the boxed equipment we had tested and priced to date and put it out on the tables, saving us a little time the following morning.

From Saturday 14th to Monday 16th February, we were totally dedicated to the jumble sale at the Old School and, despite the previous few Saturdays we had spent testing, pricing and boxing electrical equipment, these proved to be three long and tiring days. Even then, it was not sufficient time to test and price everything that had been accumulated and there was another shelf full of equipment awaiting attention for the next sale in six weeks' time. The sale itself was a huge success and a good sum of money was collected to help fund the long needed improvements to the church.

We had a day out on Tuesday 17th February. Our first stop was to drop off some bagged clothes for cash. We used to go to Tracey's building in Bury but that had closed and the rumour was that the company had filed for bankruptcy, not that one would have expected it with the rates they paid. We found an alternative establishment on Rochdale Road, just past the M66 junction that paid a reasonable price. Unfortunately, the chap there did not speak English, appearing to be Russian or Polish. We were paid in sterling, though.

Wednesday 18th February was not a bad day and I did manage to replace the second bulb that had failed in the outside lamp on the patio. We were, at last, back up to full luminosity. I did have an invitation to go walking Oldham way with Frank and co. but I had declined on the basis that we were going to see Jenny's niece, Tracey, in Sheffield. Jenny had since

decided that the week end would be better for that purpose but I felt too tired to go walking.

Thursday 19th February was largely productive in only the IT sense, Jenny's laptop being ready for use, not that Jenny used it much now she had given up being a Beaver Leader. I did manage a couple of routine chores, like washing the pots and cleaning out the fire while waiting for the man from British Gas to come and survey the property for our free installation of cavity wall insulation. This was the second such survey and the result was the same. It would be too expensive because of the scaffolding we would require to span the conservatory and garage extensions at the back of the house.

I might have burst into action after lunch had Christine not telephoned to ask me to have a look at her computer which was refusing to access the Internet. Christine collected me about 4 p.m. and it took me about five minutes to discover that the installation of a new broadband router from TalkTalk had resulted in the network cable from the PC being plugged into the wrong socket on the router. This new router had an uplink network connection to a high speed modem, coloured red, as opposed to the network connections, coloured yellow. The network cable from the computer was red, so, naturally, ...

While I was there, I helped Christine order a new computer and she gave me a lift back home.

Friday 20th February was our usual shopping day out at Unicorn and Waitrose. Our usual routine was preceded by an early morning start to take delivery of a grocery order from Abel and Cole and, by the time I had managed to crawl downstairs at 7:45 a.m., the chap had already been, the empty boxes from our last order which I had left our for return having been collected and our two boxes sitting on the floor outside the front door.

We had stopped ordering a great deal and frequently from Abel and Cole because they had ceased stocking much of what we needed, including large organic meat roasting joints. Most of our grocery business had moved to Waitrose.

Another diversion from our regular weekly outing was my morning appointment with the doctor to discuss the outcome of my recent ultrasound scan. The first bit of good news was that I wasn't pregnant.

My more sensitive parts were given a clean bill of health, which came as some relief. Unfortunately, the bad news was that my bladder seemed to be over fond of its contents and refused to part with a residual half a litre of fluid. The diagnosis was that my prostate, of which I am quite fond, was enlarged and squeezing the urethra, restricting the outward flow. The prostate itself was not a problem, except in this one respect. I did have a friend with a similar problem a few years previous and, after a minor, non-invasive, surgical procedure, he was able to "pee over a five-bar gate" as he put it. It seemed that medical practice had moved on. I was prescribed a course of tablets, specifically designed, by a urologist, no less, to relax the tissue of the prostate surrounding the urethra and was advised they would take about three weeks to start working. I was not one for tablets but I thought I'd give it a try for a month, at least, on the basis that if the retention problem continued it could lead to all sorts of other complications.

The visit to the surgery delayed our weekly routine until 11 a.m. and, thanks to a broken-down lorry on Barton Bridge that was blocking two of the three lanes of the M60, it took us two hours to complete our journey to Unicorn that normally takes about forty minutes. That meant we left Waitrose late and we had another crawl round the M60 in the opposite direction on the way home. Thankfully, it was half-term, otherwise the traffic would have been much worse at that time of day.

We went to visit Jenny's niece, Tracey, in Sheffield on Saturday 21st February and came back with a car load of goods for our car boot sales. We called at the refurbished Beefeater at Heaton Park for a very nice evening meal.

I had intended to wash the salt from the roads off the car on Sunday 22nd February, after emptying it, leaving Jenny to sort out her car boot stock in the garage. Rain prevented that and Treacle, our cat that wasn't very well didn't help by deciding to relieve her bowels on the lounge carpet. This was the second time she had had such an accident, the first time being a few days earlier, fortunately, on the tiled floor of the conservatory, making it much easier to clean. I, of course, had that job. Jenny, who witnessed the latest incident, was not feeling too well, having just eaten breakfast. We decided to confine Treacle to the tiled floor areas of the house and we brought in her litter tray from the garage as a contingency measure until we decided what to do about her problem.

That dealt with, Jenny and I spent most of the day unloading the car, sorting the goodies and testing the electrical equipment ready for our first car boot sale of the season as soon as the freezing-cold monsoon season ended. The only good aspect of the torrential rain was that it washed away all of the snow that had fallen earlier in the day.

I finally managed to make some progress with filling the huge hole in the small bedroom wall on Monday 23rd February and used up all the available Multipurpose Polyfilla for interior walls I had earlier purchased from B&Q.

Having run out of filler for the small bedroom wall and this not being B&Q discount day, I settled down to teach myself Java on my PC on Tuesday 24th February and spent most of the day at it. After writing three separate pieces of code, I had reached the stage of accepting input from the keyboard using a window and displaying information the same way. It was going to be some time before even the glimmer of light shone at the other end of the tunnel.

I managed to find enough energy to go to the village meeting at the Golf Club in the evening, although I did take the car, the evening being dark and cold.

On Wednesday 25th February, we had a day out. Yes, another trip to the tip, followed by an abortive attempt to dump another four bags of clothes at the weigh-in for cash and a drop-in at B&Q at Heap Bridge on the return journey to Bury for four bags of filler for the hole in the wall in the small bedroom. Back in Bury, we stopped off at Pets at Home for some cat litter.

Treacle, our rather poorly cat, had, in her old age, had decided to become a house cat. At least she still had the good sense to use the litter tray, or, on the occasions when she missed, nearly use the litter tray. The tray was strategically positioned on newspaper on the tiled floor

at the far end of the kitchen, close to the wide, patio doors, except at night when it was placed on newspaper on the tiled hall floor. Thankfully, we had a plentiful supply of plastic bags, disposable gloves and anti-bacterial wipes. Our general waste bin was starting to become rather full, though and it was only emptied every three weeks. That was strategically positioned down the passage at the side of the house and the conservatory windows were firmly shut.

Back in Bury, we parked at the retail centre, near Tesco and walked into the market for a couple of items. Imagine my delight when, on returning to the car, we came straight home.

I spent much of the morning on Thursday 26th February updating the village web site, following the receipt of the minutes from the meeting on Tuesday. That was punctuated with a need to wash the pots from the previous evening and breakfast and to clean the fire from the previous night's use – oh, and clean the cat's litter tray for the second time.

After lunch, I took Jenny to Radcliffe for a routine medical screening, best described as unpleasant and uncomfortable but necessary. Reaching the Primary Care Unit would have been easier if half the roads in Radcliffe had not been closed. Instead we ended up going round in circles for the best part of ten minutes before Jenny decided to get out and walk while I weaved round the back streets trying to find an approach to the Unit's car park. I arrived at the car park as Jenny was going in through the door. Some meaningful diversion signs would have been useful and it would have helped if at least some of the roads actually had name plates. They should make navigating Radcliffe an Olympic Event.

Friday 27th February was a routine grocery shopping day at Unicorn and Waitrose and we had an unusually comfortable trip round the M60 and back, averaging over 60 miles to the gallon. It's amazing what an early start can achieve.

We spent most of Saturday 28th February (well, the afternoon, anyway, after routine household chores) at the Old School testing and pricing electrical equipment in preparation for the next jumble sale.

It seemed like as good a way as any to end the month.