

Greenmount – February 2016

Monday February 1st: I put on a brave front and an even braver back as we motored into Ramsbottom in the horizontal, frozen rain. By the time we had reached the car park at the top of the hill, not wishing to risk the one at the bottom in case the river burst its banks again and flooded the whole valley, both the rain and wind had abated and white, fluffy clouds had appeared in a blue sky. The sun actually penetrated through to ground level, though it remained cold.

Jenny wanted to post some cards and went into the post office in Morrisons to check that the envelope was not too heavy or large for a first-class stamp, which it wasn't.

There then followed the usual tour of the charity shops, Jenny finding a couple of books, before returning home for lunch. I spent the rest of the day nursing my affliction and updating the village web site.

Tuesday February 2nd: The horizontal, frozen rain was back and this time had waited until we had parked the car in Tesco's car park in Bury. We had suitably soaked legs by the time we had crossed the main dual-carriageway and walked up into the town centre, not having bothered to wear our waterproof trousers since it was fine when we left.

We stopped at W H Smith to collect a book on gluten-free cooking I had ordered online for Jenny's birthday. I had planned to purchase it from Amazon but it was cheaper on the W H Smith web site if I ordered it for collection from the store. Had I purchased it off the shelf in the store or had W H Smith delivered it to my home address, it would have been more expensive than Amazon. So how does that work, then? The same book from the same store is cheaper if I order it online and collect it than if I buy it off the shelf.

A brief visit to a new, large, charity shop proved fruitless and we returned to potter round the aisles of Tesco before coming home for lunch.

The afternoon was almost a repeat of the previous day, with yet another update to the village web site, after which, having spent a good couple of hours in the conservatory, I was absolutely frozen and came into the lounge for a warm, except that it wasn't. I put on the heating and shivered for an hour, until I started to feel the effect of our central-heating system. At least the cold stopped my rash from itching.

Wednesday February 3rd: It was a rather pleasant sunny day until mid-afternoon, when the inevitable rains came yet again. I lit a fire for the first time for a while to help Jenny's gluten-free pizza base to rise so she could make the roast vegetable and chicken pizza for tea – and very nice it was too.

Apart from that frenzied activity, I fiddled about on the PC again, adding yet more NZ pictures to my web site. My rash was quite itchy and the nerves inside quite painful.

Thursday February 4th: Our night was even more eventful. I had discovered that if I could keep my rash cool, the itching subsided and I had used a cold water bottle in bed the previous night with a good degree of success. On this occasion, Jenny had filled the bottle

and when I placed it in bed and laid on it in the wee small hours, it started to leak. The result was probably the quickest bed linen change and mattress flip on record. It didn't help my itch and it took me a good hour to nod off, resisting the urge to scratch like a dog with flees.

Given the lack of sleep, we were up relatively early, well, before 10 a.m. anyway.

I cleaned out the fire and then settled down to more PC work, checking my E-mails and updating the record of gas and electricity payments, having received the latest bill. I had noticed that the more active I was, the more my rash itched and the more internal nerve pain I had and it was, after three weeks or so, becoming quite annoying. According to the doctor, the rash should have just about disappeared by now.

Friday February 5th: The usual long grocery shopping trip to Unicorn and Waitrose went well and took my mind off my troubles for most of the day. I discovered that the itching responded well to heat and, with the aid of a hot water bottle, managed some sleep, broken only by the need to come downstairs and refill the bottle with fresh, hot water – twice.

Saturday February 6th: Given the broken sleep, it was something of a miracle that we arrived at the Old School before 9 a.m. Jenny was helping out with one of the stalls at the village Drop-in while I found a small space to continue testing and pricing electrical items for the jumble sale, concentrating initially on appliances donated that morning. One of these included a reasonably-looking Toshiba laptop, including a power supply. Unfortunately, it had a power on password and this had not been supplied so I resolved to bring it home to work on it.

We had brought our own packed lunch, Jenny requiring gluten-free food and then we continued working until about 3:30 p.m., by which time everyone else had gone and I was beginning to feel tired. It took us nearly an hour to tidy up and we came home for tea.

It was my intention to help prepare tea but I fell asleep in the chair for two hours, the cat keeping me company.

Sunday February 7th: The previous night's hot water bottle had not been so successful and another night of broken sleep meant a late start. Apart from going out during the briefest of dry spells to deliver the latest village newsletter, I spent my time on the computer.

Monday February 8th: The effect of the overnight hot water bottle was almost negligible and I ended up discarding it and also the T-shirt in which I slept, finding that keeping my rash cool was more successful. Still feeling uncomfortable, I spent much of the day on the computer and trying to fix the Toshiba laptop that had come into the jumble sale.

I had sent Toshiba a request for help the previous day and received a reply back telling me I would have to send the laptop in to an authorised engineer, incurring courier costs of £60 before anyone could give me a price for repairing it. I considered that to be totally unhelpful and not really in keeping with the objective of the jumble sale, to which several local residents freely devote their time. I told Toshiba so.

I tried solutions to my problem suggested on various web sites but they did not work.

At this juncture I had two observations. First, **never** use a power-on (BIOS) password, especially on laptops, because if you forget it, it will be cheaper to buy a new laptop than to have the manufacturer repair it. Second, don't buy Toshiba. The company is totally unsympathetic to community and charitable organisations, seemingly only interested in profit. So what's new?

I had also contacted Greater Manchester Police to check that the laptop had not been stolen. They had no record of it having been so.

We did briefly nip out to collect a microwave for the jumble sale and to test the lady's own microwave for radiation leaks while I was there.

Gwen had also asked me on Saturday if I would look at their printer-scanner which had not worked since their Broadband had been changed. This I still had to arrange.

Tuesday, February 9th: I managed a trip into Ramsbottom, braving the sleet, hail and rain, despite the uncomfortable itching and relatively sleepless night yet again. I thought the fresh air and a little exercise would do me good.

Our first port of call was Santander. I do like the Ramsbottom branch because it is usually relatively quiet and on this occasion I had the choice of two ladies, a rare event these days in every sense. The lady with whom I dealt could not have been more helpful and I left a satisfied customer once more, another rare event these days.

We walked along the main road to see the herbalist and an over-the-counter discussion about my condition resulted in a herbal tea mixture, a sample of chickweed-based cream that might ease my irritation and a bottle of the organic cranberry juice we usually have with breakfast.

A potter round the charity shops resulted in two books for Jenny and a pit-stop at both Morrisons and Tesco enabled Jenny to obtain a few grocery items, although her forage for the usual ivory dinner candles proved fruitless.

We lunched at home and I settled down to yet more PC work.

Wednesday, February 10th: It was a beautifully sunny day, if somewhat cold and after the usual morning chores of pot washing and taking the sorted rubbish to the various bins, I decided it was time to update the Tottington Civic Society's web site, not having done so for some time. Fortunately, there was not a lot of activity on it, so the demand on my time for this was not great. There was also another brief update to the Dementia page on the Greenmount Village web site, having spent much of the previous afternoon on a fairly large update, requiring some restructuring of the home page. Had I felt better, I would have tended to some jobs outside.

Thursday, February 11th: Despite another restless night, we were up relatively early. I decided to try to manage with wearing just my T-shirt rather than an additional woolly jumper, despite the drop in temperature outside, to keep my rash cool and prevent it itching so much. That seemed to work quite well and after the usual morning chores, I cleaned out the

fire from the last use and then put on my fleece and went outside in the sunshine (yes, sunshine two days running, something of a record for the year to date) to do some of the outstanding jobs while Jenny went off to Ramsbottom with her friend, Gwen. It seemed a shame to waste the nice weather, even if it was a bit on the cool side.

The first job was to replace the bulb in the outside light at the back.

That done, I turned my attention to the downspout for the garage gutter, which was clogged with leaves and such. I cleaned that and the section of guttering I could reach from the back and finished off by squirting the hose down it to make sure any debris inside it was washed out.

I swept up a bit of the patio Jenny had missed the previous day and then cleaned most of the gutter round the conservatory. The difficult part was the box section between the conservatory and the garage and I left that for the time being since I would probably have to tackle that from the garage roof, lying on my front with my head down towards the guttering. It was really a job for a contortionist, not someone of advanced years with a liking for food and wine and suffering from shingles.

I came in to prepare lunch. While my pie was warming, I tackled a few small jobs on the PC and listened to a jazz CD of Ken Colyer's Jazzmen recorded live at Eel Pie Island in 1957. The recording is a double CD set and, unfortunately, the recordings are not very good but they are significantly historic, worth a listen and worth adding to a jazz collection. Ken Colyer was a follower of the New Orleans tradition; none of the modern, cacophonous rubbish for him, thank goodness.

Being a regular listener to BBC's Jazz Record Requests on Radio 3 on Saturday afternoons, I am amazed how many followers of Jazz actually claim to like this latter obscene assault on the auditory senses. Or is it a case of wanting to be seen to appreciate what seems to be the accepted genre of jazz and simply putting up with it? Of the jazz tunes played in JRR, on average, I find only a couple to my liking, averaging about six minutes in total of the hour-long programme. And of the other Jazz programmes the BBC broadcasts, just about all of them concentrate on the modern jazz scene. Is the proportion of Traditional Jazz fans out there really that small?

Friday February 12th: After our short grocery shopping trip to Prestwich, with a detour to Asda at Pilsworth on the outward journey, this week and lunch at home, we went round to the Old School to prepare for the Jumble Sale on the coming Monday.

Saturday February 13th: We had a long day at the Old School testing and pricing electrical items for the jumble sale.

Sunday February 14th: We had another long day, working at the Old School until about 3:30 p.m. and then we came home to change and join Matthew, Carrie, Rachel and Amy for a very nice early evening meal at the Swan and Cemetery. Amy, having returned to England from a short holiday over Christmas with family in her native New Zealand and friends in Australia, had finally succeeded, after a year's long struggle, in registering as a nurse in England and was working as a theatre nurse in London. She had come up to Manchester for

a week-end break to visit us and she was staying with Matthew and Carrie. It was very nice to see Amy again and catch up on all the news. It was a pity her break from work was so short and we looked forward to seeing more of her.

Monday February 15th: Matthew dropped Amy off about 9:15 and went off to work. Amy breakfasted with us and we took her round to the Old School for a quick look at the jumble and to meet and chat with several of the people there who met Edith and wished to be remembered to her.

We were going to take Amy to the tram station in Bury so she could be in Manchester to catch her train back to London at 1 p.m. but Matt had told us there were long delays on the tram due to “an incident”, so we took Amy to Piccadilly in the car and said our brief farewell on the double-yellow lines outside the station.

We were back at the Old School in good time to tidy up before the sale at 4 p.m. Our takings seemed to suggest that all our hard work had not been in vain and when we boxed up the unsold items afterwards, most of which were shipped off to Father Wyatt in Salford to aid his good works in the community there, I retained some of the better items for the next sale.

Being tired, we ate at the Bull’s Head Toby Carvery and retired about 10 p.m., sleeping for almost 12 hours. It had been a hectic few days.

Tuesday February 16th: It was time, once again, to update the village and Tottington District Civic Society’s web sites and, although there was not a lot to do, it did take quite a while. After that and a few other bits of administration work, I went round to see Frank and Gwen to look at their Epson XP-215 all-in-one printer and scanner.

Gwen had mentioned the Wi-Fi printer had not worked since they changed their broadband to Sky and I said it was probably a configuration problem with the network settings on the printer. The problem was that there was no mechanism on the printer for changing the settings, no LCD screen on the printer on which to view them and no obvious way of communicating with the printer using a USB cable to access the settings. I gave up and brought the printer home.

Having searched the Internet for help and found all of the articles mentioning this printer absolutely useless, I found an option on the Epson web site to allow me to chat online with someone. The chap was very helpful and pointed me to a web link that would download software to set up the printer.

I downloaded the software and installed it on Jenny’s laptop. I also downloaded the drivers and tried to install them. That did not work and the software seemed to reference a different printer model entirely.

I decided to run the set up software and, with the printer connected to a USB port, this installed the drivers and configured the wireless network automatically, presumably obtaining all of the wireless settings from the laptop, since my router does not even broadcast the network name (SSID) and is configured with a random 64-character key code.

I managed to reattach the scanner cover that Frank had dislodged while scanning thick documents, refit the paper support that had come adrift from its slider on one side, wirelessly scan a document and wirelessly access the status monitor to discover the reason it would not print was that the printer had run out of yellow ink. I let Gwen know it was fixed and I needed some ink to test the printing. She said she would drop some off for me in a day or two.

It did occur to me that I would need to rerun the set up software again for Frank and Gwen's own router configuration when I returned it.

Wednesday February 17th: We decided not to go to Bury in the dull, wet and cold, the past few days having been bright, sunny and cold. The sun and blue sky I found very uplifting and one could put up with the cold; somehow, the dull and wet seemed to make the cold much worse than it was and it was very depressing.

Instead we had a lazy day at home and I added more New Zealand photographs to my web site.

Thursday February 18th: I was back in walking mode at long last and I met Frank, Steve and Mike at 9 a.m. at Frank's house where Gwen drove us to the tram station in Bury. We caught the first tram after 9:30, when our free passes commence for the day, into Piccadilly, Manchester and after a brief stop at Costa Coffee for a hot drink, we boarded the train to Woodley on the Rose Hill, Marple line. From there we walked up the road to the access point for the Tameside Trail and walked the 6 or so miles over hilly and, in parts, very soggy, terrain to reach Broadbottom in the late afternoon, catching the train back to Piccadilly and another hot drink at Costa Coffee. It was then a case of catching the tram into Bury and diving into the Art Picture House (a Witherspoon pub) for further refreshment and tea. We took a taxi back to Greenmount as usual, arriving home about 8 p.m.

When we had left Greenmount, it was foggy and very icy and slippery underfoot. By the time we reached Manchester, the sun was shining and we had a very pleasant day with wonderful views of Manchester, looking down from the hills around Tameside and also of the traffic into and out of Manchester airport. When we returned to Bury, we noticed it had been raining there and when we arrived back in Greenmount it was pouring down.

It occurred to me that with such differing weather patterns in such a short distance (fine and dry in Manchester, wet but not raining in Bury and pouring down in Greenmount), weather forecasting must be extremely difficult and wholly unreliable, as experience has confirmed.

The photographs of the day are on the website if you care to browse them.

Friday February 19th: We went to Unicorn in Chorlton and then on to Waitrose at Broadheath near Altrincham for our grocery shop of the week. We had a late start and did not leave Waitrose until about 3 p.m. The journey home, which should have taken about 45 minutes took us about 2 hours due to severe congestion on the M60. I doubt our speed on the 10 or so miles of motorway reached an average in double figures.

Given the lack of any information regarding the cause for the delay, I can only assume it was due to the sheer volume of traffic. The conclusion I drew from this is that there were simply

too many vehicles on the road and our infrastructure was unable to cope. The obvious solution was to reduce the number of vehicles and the easiest way to do that was to make the driving test more rigorous and to ensure all drivers retook the test at regular intervals in order to renew their licence to drive.

The previous day's experience of travelling on the tram from Manchester to Bury, not a singular one I might add, pointed to a greater underlying problem. People on the tram were packed like sardines in a can and this was yet another indication that our transport system as a whole could not cope with the volume of travellers, an experience shared by commuters in cities around the country. The issue to which I refer is that there were simply too many people on these crowded islands of ours.

Rather than think about opening up our country's doors to refugees from other countries at the time, we needed to be thinking about ways and means of reducing our population. We could not do this and remain a member of the EEC and it was imperative that, in order to protect and manage our own affairs, we voted in the pending referendum on the issue of membership to withdraw from it.

Let us not forget that when we joined the Common Market in Europe, it was only a trading arrangement. Over the years, the European Parliament evolved and assumed a life of its own. I could not deny that a good deal of sensible rules and regulations that had a positive effect on the environment originated from Brussels but that was accompanied by a good deal of rubbish and authoritarianism that came at a high cost.

Saturday February 20th: The routine of washing and reapplying cream to my slowly fading shingles rash morning and night continued and it must have been into the seventh week by this time. Thankfully, the irritation and sensitivity had considerably reduced. I had developed some irritating spots on my forearms, particularly the right, over the past few days and I was also applying the cream to those, which seemed to have a more immediate effect. Whether they were connected with shingles or caused by something else I did not know. There was little sign of the glandular swelling in my left armpit, which the nurse thought was part of the shingles infection, reducing despite the herbal cleansing tea I was drinking, although in less quantity than I should.

The day itself got off to a slow and late start, the cat pinning me down in my chair. In her old age, she was seeking more attention and comfort and there were signs that she was troubled by her hip joints, suffering from arthritis. Thankfully, she seemed to be responding well to her daily kidney tablets.

Isn't old age wonderful?

The pots washed, I cleaned out the fire, laid a new one and lit it. It was not very warm and I put on the central heating in the meantime.

I busied myself testing a wireless Epson printer, not unlike the one I had repaired for Frank and Gwen, for the next jumble sale at the Old School in March. I used the same technique, that was the device set up software from Epson that did everything using a USB cable, although this one had an LCD screen, a menu and navigation buttons, which was just as well

because the automatic wireless set up failed. Resorting to using the printer buttons and screen, I painstakingly entered the network details, including the 64-character network key. It wasn't until I reached the 64th character that the set up failed because the SX 305 printer would only accept up to 63 characters. It was using an old standard. I checked online for a firmware update and could not find one. I would have used the online chat support but it was closed at weekends so I decided to leave that until Monday.

I turned my attention to downloading the photos from my camera, processing them and putting them on my web site, a task I did not quite finish even though I worked at it through the evening.

Sunday February 21st: The day was repeating, at least up to the point of testing the printer, with the exception of laying and lighting the fire. I updated the village web site, the Tottington web site and finished off the task I did not complete the previous day, updating my web site.

Monday February 22nd: The sun put in one of those rare appearances and we took full advantage of the nice weather, even though it was cold, taking a boot-load of rubbish to the recycling point (or tip) in Bury. We came home for lunch and then tootled off in the opposite direction to drop off a few items for the animals at Bleakholt Animal Sanctuary.

That was after I had contacted Epson to try to resolve the printer problem of the previous day. The short answer is that there was no solution to the problem and I deemed the printer to be obsolete and it joined the recycling consignment. I think the chap at Epson detected I was not best pleased, although it wasn't his fault.

I decided to use the computer to keep a record of the TV programmes I was recording and spent much of what was left of the afternoon and evening completing the task.

Tuesday February 23rd: It was another nice day with lots of sun and a very cold breeze. I wrapped up well and spent much of the day wood cutting, not that I saw any young ladies in red cloaks. Jenny joined me outside and tidied up her car boot items in the garage, for which I had moved out the trailer.

Wednesday February 24th: The day started sunny and bright but it wasn't long before the clouds returned and we had a few flurries of snow and light hail. That didn't keep us in, though, with a brief grocery shopping trip to Bury.

After lunching at home, I went to see Gwen and Frank to return and install the printer I had fixed for them and I also tidied up their laptop to improve its performance. I returned with a bottle of white wine which went admirably with tea.

Thursday February 25th: We started walking later than usual this week because Steve had early morning business elsewhere. We all met up at Steve's house about 9:45. It was a very cold, frosty morning, although the sun had been up long enough to melt most of the overnight frost and Steve's wife, Lavinia, gave us a lift to Bury to catch the tram to Piccadilly Station. After the obligatory stop at Costa Coffee, we boarded the train to Woodley yet again and walked up the same road as the previous week, turning off to the left this time.

Our walk took us in the opposite direction to last week's walk, still following the Tameside Trail. We passed the derelict Unity Mills, followed the railway line for a short distance and then turned left down a very muddy field to join the Peak Forest Canal as far as Haughton Dale Local Nature Reserve. The path down through the reserve took us to the River Tame, which we crossed. We turned left and followed the river for some distance to Redish Vale., lunching on the way, seated on a conveniently-placed bench. The path led us up to Stockport Road, which we crossed and picked up the trail on the opposite side through very muddy fields. Unfortunately, the path petered out and the lack of way-markers saw us consulting the map and the GPS before finding the route, taking us under the M60, once more by the river Tame. We strayed from the track, missing a right turn down a path to the right as we walked up Mill Lane, Denton, once more due to a lack of signs marking the route on this urban section. We eventually picked up the path again along the back of Brook Green Cemetery, Frank remarking "This must be the dead centre of Denton".

A stroll through Debdale Park, not by the lake as we should have been, brought us out on the Tameside Trail once more as we crossed the Denton and Fairfield golf courses, reaching the golf and sailing club of the latter. There we turned left down a narrow track to bring us onto another urban section near Fairfield Station. As we followed the streets there, we passed through the little-known and quaint Moravian Settlement and where the motor vehicles parked there replaced with horses and buggies, one would think they had stepped back in time about two hundred years.

For the last section of the walk, we made our way to the Ashton Canal and followed that to a footbridge, where we crossed the canal and took a short path, leading us up a road to Ashton New Road. There we boarded a tram at Edge Lane and, after a brief stop at Piccadilly, where we had to change trams anyway, for a refreshment break, we boarded the extremely crowded tram to Bury.

Needless to say, that was not the end of our day. The Art Picture House furnished us with a reasonable meal and some pleasant alcoholic refreshment before we took the usual taxi to Greenmount.

We had covered about 8 miles and the pictures are once again on the web site for those who wish to view them.

Friday February 26th: It was the turn of Prestwich to receive our grocery custom this week and, following a brief stop at Asda, Pilsworth, we made our way to Tesco.

The journey home was uneventful until we were about half a mile from home, on Brandlesholme Road, not far from the junction with Longsite Road. There, traffic was stationary and we soon learned from a passer-by that there had been an accident at the junction, which is notorious for such and no-one was being allowed through. We, like many other drivers, turned our vehicles round and headed back to Bury to take the route through Tottington home. As we did so, we noticed that the busses that normally travel down Longsite road in the opposite direction were being rerouted through Tottington, so we deduced that the road was, indeed, closed, an event normally reserved for occasions when a death occurs.

After lunch, we had a leisurely afternoon.

Saturday February 27th: After briefly helping to tidy the lounge, I spent the day wood-cutting again while Jenny dusted polished and vacuumed the lounge, punctuated by lunch. As the afternoon drew to a close, Jenny came out to help me tidy up and she collected all the loose pieces of wood that had blown off the trees on the grass at the side of the house and put it in the bin for garden waste.

What exciting lives we lead.

Sunday February 28th: I spent much of the day updating the village web site, having missed the village meeting on the previous Wednesday evening and receiving the last piece of information for the week by E-mail at about 5 p.m. The one outstanding item was to post the copy of the March (Church) Digest magazine, the printed version issued in A5 booklet form. The electronic copy was sent to me with each two A5 portrait pages on a sheet of A4 landscape paper. I had constructed booklets like this before, the principal being to produce the A4 pages as follows:

Page 1: last A5 page on the left and the first A5 page on the right

Page 2: second A5 page on the left and the last A5 page minus one on the right

Page 3: last A5 page minus 2 on the left and the third A5 page on the right

Page 4: fourth A5 page on the left and the last A5 page minus 3 on the right

And so on, such that, when printed double sided, the odd A4 pages are printed first and then the pages are turned over and the even pages are printed on the back. When the finished print is folded down the centre, this produces an A5 booklet with the pages in the correct sequence.

Unfortunately, the document I received did not seem to follow this pattern and I was at a loss to understand how the print I received could produce an A5 booklet. Neither could I ascertain the correct order of the A5 pages from the document so I queried the format with the author. It was suggested I obtain a printed copy from the church, which was a satisfactory approach, since I had to extract the pages from the document anyway to present an online A5 viewable document.

I said life was exciting.

Monday February 29th: Despite a restless night and retiring late, we were up about 7:30 a.m. in time for the chimney sweep I had booked and expected between 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. In the event, the two chaps arrived about 9:00 a.m.

It took the two chaps about half an hour to sweep the chimney. They were very efficient and made no mess. The cost was £66 including VAT, which was more than I was expecting and the recommendation was that the chimney was swept every six months, although one of the chaps admitted that chimneys with linings accumulate very little soot compared with ones without and since we used the fire only occasionally, we had not had it swept for four years, so in that context, it was not bad value for money.

After the two chaps had left, I cleaned my walking boots ready for the following day's walk from Edge Lane, Ashton to Greenfield, Oldham.

In the afternoon we went down to Summerseat Garden centre and bought twelve bags of organic blend soil for the raised beds, a tub of organic chicken manure pellets for the garden and a packet of organic manure granules for the raised beds. We stored those in the garage for use later in the week, weather permitting.

The month ended on a low note. Having had several days of fine, sunny weather, although quite cold, in the last few hours the weather was back to normal with rain setting in for the night and not boding well for the morrow.