

Greenmount – February 2017

Wednesday February 1st: Another day of ceiling scraping loomed with the added bonus of preparing my own lunch since Jenny had tootled off for lunch with Gwen at Summerseat Garden Centre, not that I minded because there wasn't much she could do at home anyway. I could have gone walking with the chaps but I wanted to get the work done. Two months wasn't long considering the amount of work needed.

Having just about worn out my last spare blade for the scraper and Jenny having returned, I stopped working just after 4 p.m. and we tidied up.

We went down to B&Q for more spare blades only to find they had none and that the manufacturer, Hamilton, had ceased making them. We came home empty-handed.

I subsequently sent an E-mail to Hamilton.

I also found a web site (Decorating Warehouse) that had some spare blades in stock and I was about to order some when I noticed that the picture of the item that accompanied the description stated the blades were four inches long and not six as described.

I send Decorating Warehouse an E-mail as well.

My decorating project was not going well.

I looked for options, thinking I might have to buy another scraper. I discovered Wickes in Bury had some six inch scraper blades in stock (Harris Scraper Replacement Blades 150mm Pack of 2). I thought they might be worth a try.

Thursday February 2nd: This was a day of rest and recreation. Mike and Lorna had invited us out to lunch and Lorna had arranged to collect us at noon to give us a lift to the Swan and Cemetery.

I spent the morning tidying and updating my account on Jenny's laptop and my desktop computers.

Lorna and Mike came back to our house, currently rather untidy, for a coffee and a chat until they had to dash off when their son, Simon, arrived.

Afterwards, I updated my web site with the previous month's events while we watched a recording of the Raymond Briggs' animated film about his parents. I was not a great fan of animated films but there were exceptions and Ethel and Ernest was definitely one of them.

Friday February 3rd: We had a relatively uneventful grocery shopping day, visiting Wickes DIY store in Bury for some scraper blades and then Asda at Pilsworth for a few groceries and a couple of bottles of Prosecco that were on offer and not on our shopping list, on the outward journey to Unicorn and Waitrose.

Saturday February 4th: We spent the morning at the Old School, Jenny helping out at the

monthly drop-in and I testing and pricing yet more electrical equipment of which Jenny sold a couple items.

After lunch, I updated the village web site and this document, finishing off with the production of a proper DVD cover for one of those old newspaper freebies we kept and processing the recording of Jazz Record Requests, which, I was pleased to report, included yet another fair selection of traditional or traditional-style tunes.

Sunday February 5th: I spent the whole day scraping the dining room ceiling. Things were looking up.

Monday February 6th: A late start, morning shower and posting a request for assistance with a couple of annoying little quirks in Windows Media Centre on my new membership of Seven Forums took me up to noon.

We bobbed down to Wickes in Bury for more scraper blades, came home for lunch and then I started on the remaining textured paint on the dining room ceiling. I finished all but a small patch round the light fitting, more or less in the centre of the room and then tidied up for the day. To deal with the remaining small area, I needed to move the dining room furniture and take down the light fitting. That was a job for the following day.

We had a few telephone calls during the day, the most important being from a good friend from the Old School jumble team, Tom, who knew we were looking for a plasterer and he gave us the name of one recommended by a lady he knew. I contacted him and he said he would telephone me the following evening before coming round to look at the work involved.

Tuesday February 7th: We moved the dining room furniture, I took down the light fitting and replaced it with a bayonet socket connected to the lighting wire, dangling through the ceiling, by a strip connector and plugged in a single 60 watt equivalent energy-saving lamp. With a new blade in my scraper, I removed the remaining textured paint and revealed the original position of the ceiling lamp. I had moved it a little towards the kitchen wall so that it hung centrally over the dining-room table and, since I planned to move the radiator onto the opposite, outside wall and rearrange the furniture, included in the plan was to put the light fitting back in its original position, central in the dining area.

I started work on the landing ceiling. It was difficult making a start, which I managed in a thin section of ceiling between the toilet wall and the loft access using a wood chisel. Once I had cleared enough of the ceiling to insert my scraper, I made better progress, although it was still slow going.

The plasterer arrived about 4:30 p.m., sized up the work and said he would telephone me the following day with a price for doing the work in March.

Wednesday February 8th: I pressed on with the landing ceiling and made good progress, clearing the area to the front of the house, serving the small bedroom and our bedroom. After lunch, I started working back on the opposite side of the loft access to that on which I started and progress was painfully slow. I was beginning to ache a little and packed up about

5:30 p.m. to tidy up, shower and have an early tea before going to a presentation on growing vegetables, arranged by the Tottington and District Horticultural Society, at the Old School.

The plasterer telephoned while I was scraping away and gave me a reasonable price for the work which I accepted. The only snag was that he could not do the work until middle to late March.

The talk was interesting and we gained a few pointers, although the chap speaking was as much into growing vegetables on a larger scale in an allotment for show as for consumption. His emphasis was on growing organically as much as possible.

Thursday February 9th: After a restless night with aching knees and back and the cat jumping on me a couple of times (one has to get ones thrills when one can at my age), I rose early and in agony at about 8:30 a.m. It took me a good three hours to make it to the steps on the landing and start scraping a living again.

I finished off the landing ceiling and managed to make a good start on the ceiling over the staircase. This was more interesting, being progressively higher, or, alternatively, the staircase being progressively lower. I also managed to break my scraper in the process. A bit flew off the detachable piece that clamped the blade in place by means of two screws as I caught it on the stepladders while finishing off the landing ceiling. This was not as much of a showstopper as one of the screws losing its grip as I was working in the staircase section. That just about said it all.

Friday February 10th: Not only was this D-CaFF day (the day in the month when we helped out at the dementia drop-in for those unfortunate enough to be living with dementia, their carers and anyone else who fancied joining in) but Jenny was providing gluten-free, meat pie for the eight-or-so people who requested it, Nikki from the Old School jumlbers providing hot-pot for the rest, Jenny also making gluten-free, apple crumble for 86 people, to celebrate Valentine's Day. On top of that, we were giving a lift to our neighbours, Doreen and Alec and also collecting Jane, also from the Old School jumlbers. It was going to be an interesting and busy day.

Needless to say, I put the grocery-shopping and scraping on hold.

I joined Joani at the cricket club at about 11:30 to try to encourage the antiquated oven to light, since the ladies who met up the previous evening for a planning session could not do so. I spent a good few minutes on my knees with my head in the oven, Joani pressing in the gas control knob and the ignition button, a sight to behold. Fortunately there was no-one to take photographs for the web site, that is until Nikki arrived. A quick telephone call to Bill Elkin, who was working in London, confirmed we were following the correct procedure. His life has not been as sheltered as he pretended. He suggested we try using a match to ignite the pilot light instead of relying on the spark ignition. Eventually this worked and I reassembled the floor of the oven and reinserted the oven tray with Nikki's help. This was a typical case of many hands make light work.

I came home and gave Jenny a lift to the cricket club with her hot food and then came back to collect Jane from Holcombe Road and Alec and Doreen from their bungalow at the back

of our house.

It was an interesting afternoon with the hot-pot and apple-crumble lunch, followed by a beetle-drive and very well attended.

Afterwards, I ferried Jenny and my passengers back to their respective abodes and Joani later called round with a jug of gravy Jenny had forgotten, thanks for our help and some flowers for Jenny for the food she had cooked.

Saturday February 11th: It was grocery shopping day, with the scraping still on hold. We started late because Jenny was tired after working so hard over the previous few days, preparing the D-CaFF food and helping me with the tidying up after a day's ceiling scraping.

We called at Village Greens at Prestwich for a few items before making our way down the motorway to Unicorn and then on to Waitrose. Traffic attempting to turn off the motorway at the Trafford Centre was blocking the left two lanes and slowing the third lane. Apart from that, it was a fairly comfortable journey in both directions.

We learnt that Village Greens was not trading as well as was hoped of the community-run store and it was just managing to break even. That was somewhat surprising given that it is located in a busy area with, I would have thought, enough discerning people who had enough sense to realise you really are what you eat and organic food really does make a difference to your health. Even for the doubters, growing and producing food that benefits the environment instead of polluting and destroying it should be enough justification for buying it.

On arriving home, I discovered that the replacement battery for Jenny's laptop I had ordered from Duracell the previous day had arrived and I fitted it. That worked a treat.

Sunday February 12th: Matthew and Carrie had invited us for a Sunday roast. Yes, you guessed it, the scraping was scoring a hat trick, as opposed to me scoring the ceiling.

We called at Tesco in Bury for some diesel and Wickes for a new scraper and some more replacement blades. I was hoping to obtain some more bow-saw blades from Wickes as well but the only had 24 inch blades and I needed 21 inch blades. Traffic was very heavy approaching Tesco despite there being a bitingly-cold wind and sleet, making me wonder why so many people were driving around at lunchtime on a Sunday. Most of the vehicles seemed to be heading for Macdonald's restaurant and drive-through. Each to their own.

We arrived at Matthew and Carrie's house just after 2 p.m. and Bob and Marie arrived shortly afterwards. We had an excellent roast lamb dinner and a refreshing, fresh-fruit salad and home-made meringue for a sweet.

We left about 5 p.m., bringing back our dining-room chair Matthew had borrowed before our Christmas dinner there to seat Rachel on that occasion.

In the evening, I managed updates to my web site and to the Greenmount web site.

Monday February 13th: I awoke with a very painful left hip and, despite the agony and late start, I managed to scrape about half of what textured paint remained on the ceiling above the staircase, this section proving quite difficult.

Jenny had tidied round the lounge, including giving the stove a good clean, something that had needed doing for some time.

I broke off for lunch about 2:30 and rested for an hour afterwards, using the time to deal with a couple of E-mails from Terry Hanstock, taking us up to 4 p.m. Jenny persuaded me to finish for the day and we tidied up, which took another half-hour.

I rested my hip.

Tuesday February 14th: Neither of us received a Valentine card. That's what you get for being pre-occupied with decorating.

Despite the ongoing pain from my left hip, I finished off the landing ceiling (the highest part), apart from the very small area covered by the light fitting, that to be removed and the ceiling scraped at some convenient, later date and we now had bare plaster on the small bedroom ceiling, the landing ceiling and the dining-area ceiling, the latter two awaiting the plasterer, due in March.

After tidying up, I pondered what to do about the small triangle of plaster-work on the wall between the landing floor and the staircase, its present state being one of cracks and crumbling plaster with missing plaster at the top, the edge of the landing floor boards and the wood on top of the brickwork on which they were mounted being clearly visible. The strategy was to coat the existing plaster with PVA glue and then use Polyfilla to fill in the whole area up to the floorboards such that the surface was level with the edge of the boards and the staircase edge. I could then glue on a length of varnished wood to match the staircase to cover the end of the boards and the top of the plaster so that the board edges and the plaster join to the boards was not visible. That was the next piece of work, scheduled for starting on Thursday.

Wednesday February 15th: We decided to go to Bury, being market day, for a few items to tide us over instead of doing our weekly shop on Friday. We decided to walk the 3½ miles down to Bury and every step of the way was painful. Lifting up my left leg to mount the curb and walking up the steps as we approached Tesco in Bury was agony. The only shop at which purchased herbal treatments and groceries was the health food shop in the market, where we spent a substantial amount of money. I qualified for a free Vogel product, having acquired the requisite number of stamps on my loyalty card but I didn't get one. The chap who served us was not particularly helpful, bordering on unpleasant. I retained the card for the next time I needed a Vogel item and we resolved to find the products we purchased there elsewhere.

We caught the 474 bus back from Bury since we would have had to wait about an hour for the next bus through Greenmount and alighted on Longsight Road, walking back home from there. That did little to help my aches and pains.

Thursday February 16th: My plastering plans were superseded by a trip into Rambottom. We went to book a table at the Civic Hall for the indoor sale on the 5th March.

We potted round the charity shops and Jenny found me a book on the history of Sheffield and I found a DVD of Prime Suspect 3. I was still suffering with left thigh trouble.

Any spare time I had at home during the week had been spent on finishing the updates to my web site to publish all the remaining photographs from our 2014 New Zealand trip.

Friday February 17th: We went round to the Old School after Pre-school had finished at 12:30 to start work on the electrical jumble, this being the jumble week end.

I had two other items on my list of outstanding jobs, one being the water heater in the toilets and the second being the telephone internal bell that had not worked since the Openreach engineer disconnected it when fitting the new socket while trying to fix the fault on the line, which he failed to do.

We helped to put out the tables for the jumble sale and then we dealt with the electrical jumble. There was a lot of it and by the time we left about 5 p.m., we had barely scratched the surface.

Saturday February 18th: We dealt with more electrical jumble from about 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

We came home, showered and were at the Cricket Club by 7:15 p.m. for the birthday bash thrown by Joani (from the D-Caff dementia café) to celebrate a significant milestone in her life. We spent the evening chatting with Alistair and Joan and with Joyce from the D-CaFF on a table on the raised part of the room and as far away as we could get from the disco at the opposite end. Actually, we were shouting rather than chatting since none of us was particularly proficient at lip-reading or sign-language.

We came home about 10:45 and I sorted out a few things on the computer before retiring just after midnight.

Sunday February 19th: It was another 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. jumble day. Despite my comments the previous day that we had barely enough room in which to work in the confined space we had been allocated and I would fetch items from our storage area in the cellar as I needed them, all the boxes from the cellar had been dumped on the floor in our limited space because Christine needed the room in the cellar to store items for the Antiques and Collector's fair at Easter. Scrambling around trying to regain some sort of order from the chaos was akin to running through a minefield wearing a blindfold and heavy boots. To add to the confusion, items that had newly arrived were appearing from every possible direction.

By the end of the day, we had made an impression and I felt much more relaxed as the day progressed, although I was very tired.

Monday February 20th: It was an even longer day. There was still much to do before the sale at 4 p.m. and that required an early start.

Before leaving home for the tip to take the rubbish I had accumulated thus far, I pumped up the tyres on the car, having scraped the drive with the underside of the engine compartment protector the previous evening while reversing the car laden with junk down the drive.

After dumping the rubbish, we called, inevitably, at Tesco for a few grocery items. Then it was back home to drop off Jenny and the groceries and collect the mountain of spare power supplies before heading off to the Old School for another day of testing and pricing the electrical equipment.

I had set my mobile telephone alarm for 3 p.m. to give me an hour to tidy up, ready for the sale at 4 p.m. Trading was reasonable and we made about £130, which is not as much as we expected.

After the sale, we boxed the left-over items for collection by Father Wyatt's team and stored away the better items for the next opportunity to sell them, probably at the next Saturday drop-in.

We were home for about 6:45 and I relaxed with a pot of beer before a nice tea, prepared, as always, by Jenny.

Tuesday February 21st: I had a fairly restless night, due, I think, to being overtired and finally crawled out of bed and managed to stay out of bed in time for a late breakfast at 11 a.m. We had intended to go out and deliver the latest village newsletter after breakfast but it started to rain, so, for the fifth day in a row we had very little or no fresh air.

I was about to commence washing the pots when Sylvia across the back required my assistance. She was having difficulty untying an old washing line from the pole by the fence and having tied one of our lines on her pole over the top of her line, with her permission, had not made her task easy. Sylvia did manage it eventually, with some words of encouragement from me.

That led on to her second problem. She had mislaid a simple, small plastic sucker tool used to remove faulty light bulbs and fit new ones to halogen spot lights. I lent her one we had and the task was completed in minutes.

No sooner had I returned to the sink when Roy, one of our local residents, appeared at the front door with a list of people who objected to the council's sale of some recreational land on the estate, to which I added my contact details.

After finishing the chores, I dealt with the accounts and spent much of the rest of the day updating the village web site.

Wednesday February 22nd: I decided to remove the light fitting on the landing and clear the small area of textured ceiling paint that remained. That resulted in the disturbance of a screw in the ceiling that I thought held up the plasterboard. Attempting to remove the loose screw brought with it what can only be described as a shoddy piece of wood placed above the plasterboard by the original builders to hold the original ceiling fitting in place.

I replaced the piece of rubbish wood with a substantial length, securely wedged at right angles between what passed for joists in the loft, moving the original ceiling rose into the loft, screwed to one of the joists and running 3-core flex from that through a hole in the cross-piece and down through the ceiling to the light fitting. The new piece of wood was more than strong enough to hold the proper light fitting after we had finished decorating.

Wiring it all was a bit of a pain; pulling the lighting fuses took out the loft lighting so I had to work by torchlight.

I broke for lunch half way through the process and rested afterwards, using the time to sort out my latest BT bill. I had a reply to my E-mail asking me to telephone business billing yet again and I did so. A very helpful lady called Lindsey calculated that I was due a rebate of £15.08 because the cancellation of the second static IP address at £5.50 a month had not penetrated the BT minefield to reach the accounts department. Lindsey said she would address that.

On the second subject of the Calling Feature Pack for one item being charged at £3.70 a month excluding VAT and advertised on the web in the BT Price List at £7.50 excluding VAT per quarter, not taking a mathematical genius or even an accountant to work out that the latter is lower than the former, I was advised to contact BT Sales. It seems that BT was perfectly happy to flaunt the Sale of Goods and Services Act. I couldn't help thinking it would be interesting to see Graham Sutherland, head of BT Business, charged with a criminal offence.

I finished the work about 4:30 p.m. and sat down for a cup of tea to relax.

Thursday February 23rd: I was up about 8 a.m., having arranged to talk with Edith in New Zealand on Skype. I did so in my dressing-gown! We chatted for about an hour and three-quarters and then I had to rush off for breakfast and prepare to collect one of our neighbours, Eunice.

I had arranged to go to help Eunice's daughter, Dianne with her broadband. She had just moved to Vodafone and it was not working.

At first, it appeared there was a problem with the line because the router would not connect to the Internet, even when I connected it to the computer by a network cable, ruling out a fault with the wireless access on the router. It was strange that the PC would not connect to the router wirelessly and a chance remark from Dianne made me think that the PC needed to be connected to the wireless network manually. Being a new router, the computer needed to have the wireless password entered. I should have thought of that sooner!

As soon as I had established a wireless connection, I received some set-up information on the screen and followed that to achieve an Internet connection. Why it had not done this with the wired connection, I did not know and some instructions with the router on how to configure it would have been useful.

I dropped Eunice off in the village and came home. I prepared the latest village newsletter for delivery (i.e. folded the 56 copies of A4 for posting through letter boxes) and had some

lunch while retuning Media Center on Jenny's laptop because it would not connect to BBC 1 or BBC 2.

After lunch, we went off for some fresh air and to deliver the newsletter, storm Doris having abated somewhat.

No sooner had we returned than the telephone rang. Christine was having trouble with her E-mails and I said I would go round and help her so she offered to collect me in the car. Her account that accessed her E-mail on the server using IMAP had disappeared in Windows Live Mail, not an unusual occurrence with that application from what I gather. It took me a while to figure that out and, once I had done so, I recreated the account and all was restored to normal. Christine was most grateful and relieved to have her mail back intact. She gave me a lift back home.

Friday February 24th: Jenny, Rachel and I had a nice, sunny day in York, wandering round the beautiful city and its quaint streets of shops and stalls.

We called at the Swan and Cemetery on the way home for tea and had a very nice meal with good service. We left some suggestions on the card requesting such for the new menu in March. Our emphasis was on gluten-free dishes on the basis that anyone can enjoy them.

Saturday February 25th: Despite both of us feeling under the weather, we made our usual weekly shopping trip to Unicorn and Waitrose, a day late. All attempts to persuade Waitrose to offer gluten-free meals in their café to date had failed.

Christine had left a message the previous day to say her E-mail was not working and I had arranged to telephone her when I returned from shopping. She was not in when I called but telephoned me shortly afterwards and I went round to look at the problem again. She was using Windows Live Mail in Windows 10 and the fault was that I had not configured IMAP properly when I had restored it during my previous visit. I had omitted to configure the account for SSL (Secure Socket Layer) and also to set the SMTP outgoing connection to use the correct port instead of the default of 25.

Sunday February 26th: The first task of the day was to turn the Seville oranges we had purchased the previous day and which Jenny had processed and soaked overnight into marmalade. I adapted the recipe to produce a more solid, tangy marmalade, more like a jelly and with less sugar.

I then caught up with a list of outstanding IT work.

Monday February 27th: I eventually managed to start work on some plastering on the staircase, filling in some gaps and cracks in the small triangle where the staircase meets the landing, on the opposite side to the wailing wall, which was awaiting the plasterer.

I spent the rest of the day struggling with rebuilding XP on Neil's old Toshiba Equium A60 155 laptop, having replaced the faulty disc with a spare one from a discarded system. That was eventually successful, having started with an XP Professional SP2 pack, followed by an SP3 update pack, a manual installation of IE 8 and a downloaded patch to IE 8 to make it

connect to Microsoft Update. I cunningly installed a downloaded registry patch that fooled MS Update into thinking it was an Embedded XP system for POS devices (Tills, etc.) That meant it would acquire updates until that version of XP became extinct in 2019. It also meant it would try to install updates for the POS side of XP, of which some, if not all, would fail and have to be consigned to the “Ignore” category.

Tuesday February 28th: The laptop demanded some attention and the plan was to complete all the updates to date, find all the missing drivers for the hardware and to install anti-virus software. That was not so easy.

The updates went well enough and one of them was for MS Security Essentials which provided anti-virus software. This, together with the lack of memory, resulted in a few very slow responses. It also became problematic in that the underlying service would not start on a reboot without manual intervention.

The drivers were no longer available from Toshiba and an attempt to source the audio driver from another web site resulted in no sound so that was a waste of time. The system spec showed the audio system was a Toshiba special. So it was no surprise that the downloaded Realtec drivers did not work.

I managed to break off to take the cat to the see the vet for a check up without which we could not obtain any more renal tablets for her. That went well and the vet told us she could only dispense one months’ supply at a time due to new regulations governing the drug.

That concluded another fun-packed month and presented us with an increasing number of challenges for March with plastering, decorating, upgrading electrical sockets, replacing and moving radiators, replacing the dining-room carpet with a wooden floor, laying a new carpet on the landing and staircase, tending the garden and raised beds and planting vegetables and fruit bushes, not to mention cleaning the cat’s latrine. Did I mention I still needed to cut some logs for the fire and move my remaining web sites to a managed service as well as keeping them up to date and adding new information? Oh, and I left out the community projects, like the Incredible Edible plot, the monthly D-CaFF Dementia Café and Jumble Sales (check out the Greenmount web page: www.greenmountvillage.org.uk).