

Greenmount – January 2011

Welcome to a New Year. That's what we said to our six guests (Matthew, Carrie, Carrie's mum, Marie and dad, Bob and Mike and Lorna) for dinner on New Year's Day. The large turkey and seven vegetables went well, as did the home-made profiteroles with brandy cream and dark chocolate, all of which was organic. I can't remember much after that, since, it seems, I drank almost a whole bottle of white wine. That was after the most foul-tasting beer I have ever experienced – a dark, Christmas, organic ale from Unicorn.

On Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> we paid our first visit of the year to Ramsbottom and I found three James Bond DVDs in one of the charity shops for £1.50 each. I'm glad we went.

On Monday 3<sup>rd</sup>, we had planned to go to Sheffield, not having been over during the Christmas period. Unfortunately, we rose late, my having switched off the alarm because it woke me up.

Since we had not had much physical exercise during the festive season, we decided to tackle Greenmount Scout Group Walk Number Five, also known as the Redisher Wood Circular, for the second time. On this occasion we almost took all the correct paths and I am so certain I know where we went wrong that I have now documented the walk on the Greenmount Village web site ([www.greenmountvillage.org.uk](http://www.greenmountvillage.org.uk)). If you do tackle this walk and disappear off the face of the earth, please make sure your relatives contact me so that I can recheck the instructions.

On Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup>, we awoke to another two inches of snow, only having just got rid of the last lot. Fortunately, no difficulties were reported on the main routes to Sheffield and, after having cleared the driveway, we set off to visit relatives there. As we left Bury, there was no snow to be seen and the Woodhead Pennine Pass was completely clear. Jenny stayed with her niece, Tracey and I spent the afternoon with Barbara fixing light fittings and her neighbour, Rita, removing her old washer and setting up her TV, DVD player and VHS recorder such that they all worked properly. Needless to say, we returned with another car full of car boot stock and nowhere to put it.

Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup>, being the twelfth day of Christmas, was time to dismantle the Christmas tree in the lounge and it was put away much quicker than it was erected. I think it's got something to do with entropy.

On Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> the house was filled with the smell of freshly-baked bread, having been unable to find any organic loaves in the local supermarkets. You can beat 'em, so there's no excuse for joining 'em. And just to further demonstrate Jenny's versatility, after spending the day in the kitchen, she dashed off to take the Beavers for an hour from 6 to 7 p.m.

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> was another day of grocery shopping and it took so long this week that we didn't get any lunch. Is that some kind of paradox? Jenny was back at Beavers again at 5 p.m., supervising the Friday session because the ladies who run it have not yet had any training and have no warrant to do so. Jenny is one of several people on the schedule for this task and usually ends up there more often than anyone else.

Respite and relief from my mundane existence presented itself on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> when Matthew asked me to help him move a trailer load of rubbish from his back garden to the local refuse amenity. This involved moving a lot of boxes of car boot stock and the two old adjustable beds in the garage so that we could extract the trailer. On returning the trailer to its corner, we decided to tidy the garage up a little, little being the operative word. Trying to fit our stock into the garage is like squeezing a fully-grown elephant into an egg-cup.

Ramsbottom had the benefit of our company on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January

10<sup>th</sup> January saw us at Asda Pilsworth, followed by Tesco Bury, where I finally bought Jenny a new granite chopping board she has been wanting for ages. I'm not sure why she wanted it because I don't think she's used it since we bought it.

On 11<sup>th</sup> January we finally managed to produce the invitations for Jenny's birthday party. Rachel designed them on her computer and I printed them, having been unable to find any nice ones in the stores on our recent travels. The plan was to print them on the sheets of card we had purchased on our last visit to Asda but the ink kept smudging, so we had to settle for good quality paper copies instead. You can't get the wood, you know. (If you don't understand the last sentence, your experience of 1950s British humour [The Goons] is sadly lacking).

12<sup>th</sup> January was Rachel's birthday and Jenny made her a cake. She was not in celebration mood because of all the changes at work as a result of spending cuts. Somebody's got to pay for the bankers' bonuses for clearing up the financial mess they created.

On 13<sup>th</sup> January, we spend most of the day preparing for the Beaver meeting and, because Jenny had decided to do the IT Badge, I was seconded to assist with the computer practical. The speed with which the children learn and the amount they already know about computers at such a young age is amazing. When I was their age, computers were still in the experimental stage. We had only had a TV set for a couple of years and that was limited to one channel in black and white. Mind you, many of the programmes in those days were a lot better than they are now.

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> January was another shopping day. We seem to spend a lot of our time buying food and much of the remainder cooking it, eating it and washing up. If we didn't buy and cook so much, there wouldn't be so much to wash up, we would use less energy and we would need to eat less. We would then need to buy less....

For some reason, we went into Ramsbottom on 15<sup>th</sup> January, returning for lunch in the Bull's Head at noon. This was the "Jumblers" lunch, where all those who help out at the village jumble sales throughout the year are treated to a meal. One of our members, Joyce, also celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and received no less than two cakes. After lunch, we went down to Summerseat Garden Centre to spend a voucher we had received before it expired. The plan was to buy more odourless lamp oil. In the true fashion of retail inconsistency, they had none on the shelves yet again. We did manage to find something else just as useful, so much so that I can't remember what it was. On returning home, Mike arrived asking us if we wanted to take some items for our car boot stock he and Lorna did not want. Goodness knows how we managed to find room for it. Our garage now looks similar to how Mike's

garage used to look.

On 16<sup>th</sup> January, I went to see Christine Taylor, who had been having problems with her PC. Since it's running Microsoft Windows Vista, I'm hardly surprised. Its speed of response was akin to a snail in reverse. I made little progress and resolved to return at a later date.

On 17<sup>th</sup> January, the car went in for its annual MOT. It passed without any problem and seems to be in better condition than me. We did plan to start cleaning the conservatory, since it has not had a good going over (I remember that) for two years and it needed doing before Jenny's birthday party, scheduled for the 29<sup>th</sup>. I was devastated when Mike arrived with some urgent computer work and I had to abort the scheduled task.

The following day, we resumed our plans and started the cleaning work, only to be interrupted and thoroughly disappointed by a need to attend further to Christine's computer.

On Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January, conservatory cleaning recommenced in earnest, it being important (the importance of being earnest) that the work be completed this week. After a full day's hard labour, we attended the meeting of the local community group at the Cricket Club, which subsequently benefited from Mike's and my custom while putting the world to rights until about 11 p.m.

More conservatory cleaning took place after preparation for the Beaver meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Once again, I was seconded to help with the IT badge. I assume I'm getting a badge after all this effort.

On Friday 21<sup>st</sup> January, we went shopping again, via the tip in Bury to drop off some rubbish. Guess what followed? Yes, you're right. More conservatory cleaning. Jenny left me to it and disappeared off to supervise the Friday Beaver meeting yet again. At least I managed to finish the conservatory and it was, at the time, the cleanest and tidiest room in the house.

On Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup>, we tidied up the lounge before Jenny's brother, Wilf and his wife Anne arrived for a long week end. We collected them from the Metrolink station in Bury.

A point worthy of note is that, while I have used my national travel pass on the Supertram in Sheffield, Wilf was challenged by the inspector on the Metrolink in Manchester for using his here and was told he should have purchased a ticket. I have sent a message to the Metrolink people asking why this is. I have had a reply saying I shall receive an answer within fifteen working days. They obviously want to keep me in suspense.

On Sunday we all went to Matt's for lunch, meeting up with Carrie's parents, Bob and Marie. Afterwards, we took our visitors on a tour of the Ramsbottom charity shops and Memories antiques emporium. Who could ask for more? Not that we purchase much from the latter, because we think it is too expensive.

On Monday we went further afield, calling at Bleakholt animal sanctuary to drop off some food our cats will not eat and some shredded paper for the ferrets. Our cats won't eat that either. The ferrets have a choice of piecing it back together to read the content or peeing on

it. In my experience, they tend to choose the latter.

Afterwards, we found our way, more by luck than judgement, to Holden Wood Antiques, where I was almost tempted to buy another oil lamp. Seeing it needed a shade and that we have difficulty in obtaining the odourless lamp oil we use, I decided against it.

Following tea, The Heavy Thinkers quiz team swung into action at the Bull's Head for the regular, Monday event. With a respective score of 23 out of 25, we thought we did well but were beaten into third equal place by teams scoring 24 and 25. I don't think we're quite ready for Eggheads.

On Tuesday 25th, Mike called round. We dropped Anne and Wilf off at the Bury Metrolink station as they departed for their home in Sheffield.

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> January was another cleaning day as Jenny tackled the dining area. I spent most of the day crawling in the garage loft trying to gain access to the bathroom drains, which run through the kitchen extension loft. My plan was to locate and unblock the obstruction that is causing the bathroom washbasin to empty very slowly.

The first challenge was to clear enough space in the garage to work and locate the tools I needed, having to wade through boxes of car booty. That done and the ladders erected to the loft access, the next task was to gain access to the kitchen extension loft. The hole in the dividing wall, left by the chap who fitted our bathroom, was not big enough for my portly frame and I had to cut and remove two thermalite bricks before I could squeeze my body in far enough to reach the drains.

This done, I put in a hook on which to hang a light, connected it up and started to search for the blockage. I thought the fact that the drain from the bathroom sink was, at one point, running slightly uphill might have something to do with it. Having cut some wooden support blocks and strategically placed these to make sure the drains all sloped downwards towards the main waste pipe, I checked out the sink again.

While my efforts did not succeed in draining the bathroom sink, they had drained my energy and enthusiasm. One can only bear so much excitement in one day. I decided to give up and think about the problem some more. It's what I do best.

The following day, being Jenny's birthday, after grocery shopping a day early this week, I played with the drains again. Lego wasn't available when I was a kid. More strategically-placed blocks of wood to support the pipe work and the remainder of the ecologically-friendly drain unblocking fluid seemed to improve matters, although there remains an underlying problem – that is, a problem lying somewhere under the sink, between it and the main waste pipe.

I did toy with the idea of removing the T where the sink pipe connects into the pipe from the bidet and connecting the sink waste directly into the main down-pipe outside the back, on the basis that the bidet drain works well and the sink doesn't. Since this involves drilling another hole in the main down-pipe and fitting a new collar to take the new connection, I didn't toy with the idea for long.

Another obstacle to this approach is that the new waste pipe would be above the kitchen patio doors and I am not sure there is enough clearance above them to give the new external waste pipe enough of a fall to ensure adequate drainage, resulting in the same problem I have now.

Having made some progress, I decided to leave the problem for a later date.

On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> January, we nipped to Bargain Booze in Ramsbottom for beer, lager and wine. That was me sorted for the week end. Jenny spent the rest of the day preparing the food for Saturday.

Saturday January 29<sup>th</sup> was the big day. I finally bought Jenny a birthday card while she was out having her hair done. There was much activity, dusting, tidying and preparing for the evening. We had around 25 guests and they all managed to squeeze into the lounge and dining area. The conservatory was used only briefly, mainly by family members, Reuben, Jenny's cousin on her mother's side, Rebecca, Jenny's great niece and me as we talked about the family history, in which we all have an interest. The guests having departed, we finally slumped into bed at about a quarter to four in the morning.

On Sunday 30<sup>th</sup>, there was much more to tidy up and we took six chairs Mike had given us the previous day for the party to the Old School for the jumble sale in February. This was their original destination until we told Mike we were short of seating for the previous evening.

And finally, on 31<sup>st</sup> January, we had an expensive end to a busy month. We walked up to Holcombe Brook Post Office to tax the car. We also dropped off some birthday cake for our neighbour, Albert, across the back and I went to collect Christine's desktop computer to have a go at fixing it here at home. This is one instance of where Bella Vista does not apply.