

Greenmount – January 2012

New Year's Day was almost a repeat of last year with five guests (Carrie, Carrie's mum, Marie and dad, Bob and Mike and Lorna) for dinner. Matthew had a touch of influenza or some such infectious affliction, which prevented him from attending and Carrie took a portion home for him. We had a large, boned leg of pork and seven vegetables followed by home-made apple pie, all organic. Guests started to arrive about 3:30 p.m. and I managed to stay reasonably sober right up to Mike and Lorna leaving about 10:30, something of a record.

On Monday 2nd January, we went up to Boundary Mill, Jenny having received a 10% off voucher and intending to take full advantage, thereby saving money (?) I have seen better clothing in jumble sales and the shoes we liked they did not have in our sizes. We did find a few unexpected items, spending about £75.

On Tuesday 3rd January, I had to be content with a trip to Bury. Jenny and Rachel went into the shopping centre while I went hunting for a shop that I thought might sharpen saw blades up a shady back street (try saying that after a few pints). The good news was that I found the shop. The bad news was that they didn't sharpen saw blades any more. Apparently it's cheaper to throw used ones away and buy anew. And such is life.

My next port of call was the music shop in Bury to enquire about the Wittner W818 (Pyramid Oak with Bell) Metronome I had decided to buy. You may recall that I had asked a shop in Fallowfield (an obscure part of Manchester) to try to obtain one for me, their web price being £105, but I had heard nothing from them. The chap at Read, Franklin and Heywood was extremely helpful and agreed to supply one at the same price (£110) that A&L Music in Ramsbottom offered, except, if you remember, A&L Music supplied me with the one *without* the bell (W808) and still charged me £110. Ding-dong. Unfortunately, R F & H's enquiries to their suppliers seemed to confirm what A&L had told me – the W818 had been discontinued, which probably explained why the shop in Fallowfield hadn't contacted me. Isn't life complicated?

On Wednesday 4th January, I was invited to attend a shelf-erection session in the Old School cellar, finishing off the last two of the six storage racks. This was followed by luncheon at the Bull's Head with Mike and Frank and an in-depth political discussion focussing on capital punishment, where the majority were in favour of bringing back public hanging *and* the stocks. My daughter is usually quick to point out that capital punishment does not act as a deterrent and it is better to try to rehabilitate criminals whenever possible. My argument is that if you hang somebody, they're unlikely to re-offend. Of course, there is the possibility of making a mistake, although, with modern forensic methods, mistakes would, hopefully, be less likely.

On Thursday 5th January, being the twelfth day of Christmas, we dismantled the Christmas Tree and put away all the decorations in the garage loft for another year, assuming the world doesn't end on 12th December 2012, as prophesied.

Frank telephoned late in the day to tell us that, while walking the dog, he had seen chaps cutting down trees along the Kirklees Train, near to Brandlesholme Road in the village and

suggested if I wanted any logs for the fire I should nip round there rather smartly. Since it was going dark and somewhat damp, I decided to leave it until the following morning.

On Friday 6th January we went round to the Kirklees Trail, to see if there were any logs available and, to our surprise, found the tree fellers (they weren't Irish because there were at least four of them) were hard at work. Being a law-abiding citizen, I asked permission to take some logs and, that being granted, Jenny and I proceeded to load up the car. Two boot-loads later and joined by several other people who obviously had wood-burning stoves, we decided it was time to go grocery shopping.

On Saturday 7th January, we went down to Rawtenstall to fetch a couple of bow-saw blades and, armed with these, I started cutting up the wood we had acquired the previous day, the result being four sacks of logs for the fire. At £5 a bag, this stock of £20 just about wiped out the cost of my saw blades and the diesel used to fetch them, so any additional sacks I fill from the mound of timber on the drive will have cost me nothing.

On Sunday 8th January, we spent the day tidying the garage and garage loft, succeeding in completing the left-hand side and the loft. Unfortunately, the Middle of the garage was left full of items which, hopefully, would eventually fit down the right hand side. The day's work did leave the drive in a bit of a mess, with a pile of rubbish to be disposed of adding to the pile of logs for cutting. It was starting to look like Steptoe and Son's yard, which seemed appropriate, since other rooms in the house full of car-booty also resembled theirs. Perhaps we should put a horse in the garage and get rid of the car. At least horses don't drink diesel.

Our day of toil was interrupted briefly by Frank, who was passing, walking his dog in the rain. The dog didn't seem to mind. We had a brief chat and the subject turned to the following day's planned village hiking group walk, on which Frank, Mike and I had planned to go and Jenny, whose piano lesson had been cancelled, was joining us. Frank was of the opinion that, should the day start wet, commencing walking in the rain was a tad silly, especially if the prospect was for no better weather as the day progressed. He is obviously one of the more sensible village residents and, so being, we agreed with him.

On Monday 9th January, we were up early, but not as early as Rachel. It was Rachel's first day back at work with GMP this year and her first day in a new job, about the fourth into which she has been shunted following round after round of redundancies and redeployments, thanks to the cuts. You may recall that our glorious P.M. stated that the cuts in the police budget would not affect front-line policing. If this gives you the impression that there would still be the same number of officers available on the streets to fight crime, you have succumbed to the illusion created by one of the world's greatest magicians. Uniformed police officers are not being reduced in number BUT many of them are being moved into jobs previously filled by civilian staff. Not only has this reduced the number of visible police officers but the officers undertaking desk and office duties are being paid more than the civilian staff were to do the same job. The same result could have been achieved at lower cost by keeping on the civilian staff and making police officers redundant. Meanwhile, of course, crime is rife and who better to know that than M.P.s.

Jenny and I had planned to join the village hiking group on a circular walk from Ramsbottom and Mike had arranged to collect us at 08:30. When we rose at 7:00 a.m., it was

dull and dark but not raining. The forecast from the previous evening was for light rain from 6 a.m. and heavy rain from 9 a.m. but since the Met Office is usually wrong, we ignored it, fed the cats and breakfasted. Just after 8 a.m., I heard rain on the front windows, rang Mike and suggested that setting off to walk in the rain was not a good idea, following the discussion with Frank the previous day. Mike said he was going anyway and I wished him a pleasant walk/swim* (* delete as appropriate).

Jenny completed her submission for her Scouting Nights Away Permit and practised her piano, exercising her fingers if not her feet.

We spent the rest of the day continuing our tidying the garage, which, like Coronation Street, is a boring, never-ending and nauseating experience. Not that I've seen the latter since I was about seven years old, except for a nostalgic viewing of the first-ever episode, which I have recorded!

On Tuesday 10th January, our plan was to have a relaxing day placing an online order for organic meat and the odd grocery item with Abel and Cole and planning for the first Beaver session of the New Year. That was until Frank knocked on the door to inform us that there were more logs for collection down the Kirklees Trail.

After finishing the washing up, we took the car round for another boot full of potential firewood and, on returning, Jenny decided we would continue tidying the garage. By lunchtime, we could actually see the garage floor and there was a distinct possibility that a vehicle could be in the garage by the week end.

The order to Abel and Cole winged its way after lunch, by which time the temperature was dropping noticeably and my attention turned to cleaning out, setting and lighting the stove, rapidly followed by a Bacardi and Coke, a little TV and tea. It's a hard life.

On Wednesday 11th January, the sum total of my activity was to accompany Jenny to an evening talk on growing, picking, cooking and eating one's own vegetables. All I need now is a large, south-facing garden with some decent soil and/or raised beds.

On Thursday 12th January, I started the day in the Old School Cellar yet again with the intention of finishing off the work there. I repaired the screw in the bottom door hinge that would not tighten and helped Frank build a shelf support for a recess in the cellar wall. I also sanded down the wooden hand rail with the intention of varnishing it at a later date. Brian painted the back of the cellar door. The plan after all this activity was to retire to the Bull's head for a well-earned pint or three and lunch. I came home to change, only to find Jenny's laptop was not working properly and was refusing to access the television tuner, which meant the recordings I had scheduled would not take place.

It soon became apparent that this problem was going to take some time to resolve and I telephoned Mike to tell him I could not make lunch after all. It took me an hour to fix the laptop and I still am not sure what caused the problem. I was sober but not best pleased.

It was good to see that, despite messages to the contrary from Amazon UK, all Rachel's birthday presents had arrived by post and Jenny spent some time wrapping them while I was

occupied elsewhere.

It was past lunch-time on Friday 13th before I realised the significance of the day and date. Fortunately, I'm not as superstitious as I used to be, touch wood.

The order from Abel and Cole arrived early and, even though we were up and about, the driver just dumped the boxes on the drive by the front door and was back in his van before I got there. He did not even ring the door bell. The only sound I heard was the posting of the delivery note through the letter box, which I initially mistook for the mail.

We went off grocery shopping, making our first call at Bleakholt Animal Sanctuary, which is in the opposite direction, to drop off some shredded paper for bedding for the ferrets and some old VHS tapes for the shop. This detour did not delay us too much as we were able to pick up the motorway on the far side of the valley, all the way to Stretford, before taking the more sedate urban roads into Chorlton and Unicorn.

On the return journey, we called at Tesco, Prestwich, lunching at Costa Coffe there. It was interesting to see the headlines in two of the newspapers on display in Tesco depicting the large drop in Tesco's share price following poor sales over the festive season. If the bulk of what they stock is rubbish, what else can they expect? Tesco needs to realise that they do have, perhaps, more discerning customers than they believed.

We bought what items we wanted and what few organic items they still stock, having switched the bulk of our organic meat purchase to Abel and Cole. We also stocked up on wine, Jacobs Creek being on offer, although not to the extent that we would have done had better wines been on offer. I have long since decided not to pay more than £5 a bottle for a reasonable wine and I would strongly urge others to follow suit, because falling sales is the only way to get prices reduced. Buying cheaper and poorer quality wines is not a solution to the problem of high profits.

The week's grocery purchase, including wine, exceeded £200 for the three of us, although we do have meat in the freezer for the next couple of weeks and wine to last us three to four weeks.

On Saturday 14th January, we awoke to a lovely blue sky and heavy frost. After breakfast, washing the dishes and emptying the kitchen recycling bins, I turned my attention to another load of rubbish. I telephoned the Prudential Assurance Company to find out why I had received my House Insurance documents when I had cancelled the insurance on 26th December using the company's web site "Contact Us" link. It seemed this mechanism was not designed to cater for this function and, as such, the company obviously did not feel the need to adhere to their commitment to reply within five working days. My assumption that they had simply dealt with the matter, having confirmed receipt of the message, was obviously over-optimistic.

My concern was that there was a financial penalty for cancellation once the new cover had started, being due on 11th January. The lady with whom I spoke confirmed the cancellation without any fee. I stopped my direct debit to the company just in case.

We spent more time in the garage, wrapped in several layers of warm clothing and finally succeeded in extracting the trailer to take a load of rubbish to the Bury waste transfer and recycling point, or, as it is commonly known, the tip. Mike came up and was just in time to lend me a hand, his reward in advance being a cup of coffee and a piece of home-made, fruit cake. We called at the Old School to collect some rubbish from the cellar, intending to drop a load of metal off at the scrap yard in exchange for cash. Unfortunately, the scrap yard was closed, this being a Saturday afternoon, so we dropped the load off at the tip for recycling and no cash instead.

The result of our day's labours was a tidy garage, our car in it and Rachel's car on the drive.

This physical exercise was punctuated by the mental variety, as I designed a mock-up of a sign for the village in readiness for the next village meeting on the following Monday evening.

On Sunday 15th, Jenny expressed a desire to go for a stroll in the sunshine and near-freezing conditions, so we decided to meander down the Kirklees Trail to see if there had been any development with the bridge over the valley and completion of the walk/cycle way into Bury. The end of the tarmac path in Tottington led onto a levelled dirt track, ploughed up by heavy machinery, as it was the last time we ventured this way. On this occasion, our route was not barred by a construction compound and we reached the new bridge, crossed it with confidence even though it was not due to be officially opened until February and pressed on the increasingly uneven and soggy path to reach Brandlesholme Road at the site of the old bridge where the railway used to pass under the road. This stage of the walk was not without incident as Jenny came into closer contact with the ground than intended, resulting in some grazing and bruising of her right leg. The ground, as far as I could ascertain, was unaffected.

We crossed the road and found the track on the opposite side leading down to the point at which it met with the Bury end of the tarmac path, leading into the town centre. We left the trail at this point and headed along the back roads, towards home, via the wild bird hospital and past the home of Holcombe Hunt, no longer targeting foxes, thank goodness.

I estimate that we covered about five miles in the 2½ hour walk. It felt like more.

On Monday 16th we went into Ramsbottom for Jenny's piano lesson and the usual wander round the charity shops.

On Tuesday 17th January, it was time for the car's annual MOT. The result was new disc pads and discs at the rear and a new rear number plate. If only I could be fixed so easily.

On Wednesday 18th I was up at 7 a.m. and meeting Mike and Frank at 9 a.m. at the Old School for our first of what I expected to be a series of weekly walks, whatever the weather. So, in heavy drizzle, we set off for the new bridge over the Kirklees valley, retracing Jenny's and my steps of Sunday. We were not deterred by a large fence bearing a very plain message that trespassing past that point was forbidden at the end of the tarmac trail. After all, the fence and notice were not there on Sunday. As we rounded the bend on the uneven, slippery path, which was heavy going in the rain, we spotted a workman in a reflective, yellow jacket in the distance. He definitely wasn't there on Sunday.

We thought it unwise to continue and we retraced our steps to the fence and turned right, down a path into the valley and slid across the stream by means a bridge, the floor of which was covered in ice, coated with rainwater. With a sense of adventure, we turned sharp left and followed a path, along which we had never been before, by the stream back up the valley. It was no surprise that the path petered out and we ended up scrambling up a steep banking covered in brambles to the old road leading to the new housing development, if that makes sense. We followed the road and passed the bird hospital, crossing the stream by means of another bridge and followed the path up to Tower Farm. Turning left onto Sheppard's Street, we came out on Holcombe Road and decided to go up through Old Kay's Park to Turton Road and then down Two Brooks Valley, up to Croich Hay and across the field to the Gold Club.

I was back home by just after 11 and soaked to the skin. After a quick change of clothing, I was enjoying lunch with Mike and Frank in the Bull's Head at 12. Walking has its advantages.

On Thursday 19th, Mike, Frank and I were back at the Old School finishing off a couple of jobs in the cellar. Frank finished a shelf he had constructed in the alcove and I varnished the handrail on the stairs. Mike made the tea. We also started work on the executive loo by removing one of the hand rails for disabled persons. It was rusting and we intended to give it a coat of Hammerite paint. Unfortunately, two of the six screws broke and we were unable to remove them so it turned out to be a bigger job than we had expected. We left it at that for the day.

In the afternoon, I collected some wood for the fire from a neighbour and promptly cut it up before going to help out at Beavers.

The highlight of Friday 20th, apart from grocery shopping, was my attendance, with Frank, at the Cub meeting. We (the village ~~idiots~~ maintenance team) had been asked to help out with the Cubs doing their handyman badge. Frank supervised the Cubs sawing and drilling wood while I had the messy job of supervising them using a brush and roller to slap emulsion paint on some plasterboard, not to mention the floor and themselves.

Jenny, Rachel and I went out for a most enjoyable meal to Antonio's Italian Restaurant at Whitefield with Matthew and Carrie in the evening of Saturday 21st to celebrate Jenny's and Rachel's birthdays. It's time like these I wish I spoke some Italian.

On Sunday 22nd, I spent most of the day trying to find a dehumidifier to replace the Amcor HD320 that stopped extracting water from the air a week or so ago. I fancied the Amcor HD 3000H but could find no reference to it in the UK. I then turned my attention to the Olimpia Splendid Secco Pur Thermo S. I thought it sounded good. It's Italian. I did find one company in the UK advertising the old model (without the "S") but they were out of stock and that's not the one I wanted anyway. In despair, I sent messages to both companies asking where I can buy their products in the UK, not that I hold out much hope. There's no wonder the European economy is in such a mess.

On Monday 23rd, I took Jenny into Ramsbottom for her piano lesson and we wandered

round the shops afterwards.

I spent Tuesday 24th doing chores round the house and cutting wood while Jenny went for lunch with the girls. A man has to know his place.

On Wednesday 25th, Mike Frank and I met as usual at 9 a.m. at The Old School and, due to the recent spell of wet weather, we decided to restrict our walk to main paths instead of getting lost, as usual.

We headed up the main road to Holcombe Brook and up Lumb Carr Road, towards Holcombe Village, as far as the path up to Peel Tower, opposite the car park. Our pace was quite fast and the steady climb was hard work but not as hard as the next section, following the main track, steeply up to the Tower, which Mike reached a good ten minutes before Frank and I did, about 45 minutes after leaving the Old School. I didn't think that was bad going until Mike said that he and Christine normally manage it in 30.

We pressed on along the main track to Harcles Hill, Pilgrim's Cross and Bull Hill and then down to Ellen Strange. This is a cairn that reputedly marks the site where Ellen Strange was murdered by her lover in about 1750. Her lover was caught, tried, found guilty, at which point he confessed his guilt and then hanged. It sounds good to me.

Leaving the cairn, we followed the track to the junction with the lower main track. We decided not to go the short distance further on to Robin Hood's Well and turned sharp right back along the lower main track, dropping down to Lumb Carr Road and following the main road back home.

On Thursday 26th, I met up with Frank, Mike and Brian at the Old School to continue working on the Executive Toilet and we removed some of the fixtures and fittings and started plastering up all the holes and cracks, ready for painting the walls.

When I came back home to change for lunch, having arranged the usual feast in the Bull's Head, I found the new dehumidifier had arrived and I unpacked it and inspected it for damage, since any problems had to be reported within 24 hours of delivery. It all looked fine and I left it to stand for the required hour (actually it was several hours) before starting to use it.

On returning from the Bull's Head, I was sober enough to position the dehumidifier in the conservatory, plug it in and switch it on. I was even sufficiently compos mentis to alter the settings to the ones I required, having read the instruction booklet. The humidity was about 90%. Mine was somewhat higher. I left the dehumidifier to it.

On Friday 27th, Jenny's Birthday, the day started well, with Jenny opening her cards at breakfast.

Abel and Cole delivered their groceries and, this time, I actually managed to catch the driver to take the groceries off him and speak to him, giving him back the empty boxes from the last two deliveries.

We went off grocery shopping to Unicorn and called for a free lunch at Costa Coffee in Tesco at Prestwich, funded by the points I had amassed on the Costa loyalty card. So Costa Coffee doesn't have to cost a lot. We didn't buy much at Tesco because they did not have many organic products on their shelves that we wanted. We had stocked up with goodies from Unicorn and Abel and Cole.

Jenny had a horrendous evening at Beavers and, on returning, had a splitting headache. The young lads had been so badly behaved, she was ready to give up Fridays altogether. Fortunately, the parents were sympathetic and supportive and said they would do all they could to resolve the problems. Presumably the local cane and slipper manufacturers boosted their profits over the following few days.

On Saturday 28th we took Rachel to Manchester to catch the train to York for a Hen Night. In the evening, we went for a meal to the Red Lion in Hawkshaw with Frank, Gwen, Mike and Lorna. This was our first visit there for a few years and the first since it had been refurbished. We were not disappointed, except, perhaps, with the quantity of vegetables, being used to having our five-a-day twice over and in double helpings at home.

On Sunday 29th we collected Rachel from Manchester, noting how noisy it had suddenly become once more.

On Monday 30th I went to the dentist for a filling and called at one of the few post offices still left in this part of the country to tax the car for another year while Jenny went into Ramsbottom on the bus for a piano lesson and then to meet Karen for lunch. Karen kindly brought Jenny home afterwards.

Tuesday 31st was another day of household chores, leaving Jenny free to go to Yoga, on which relaxing note, January 2012 came to an end.