

Greenmount – July 2014

July started just as hectically as and immediately after June had finished.

We decided to go to Sheffield to see Jenny's niece, Tracey, on Tuesday 1st July, not having seen her for some time. While Jenny sorted yet more car boot stock and packed the car full of sacks and boxes containing I know not what, I used Tracey's PC to download Matthew and Carrie's wedding photographs I had taken from my camera and then transfer them to my portable memory stick. That took longer than anticipated because I had to install the Canon EOS software on the PC.

We left later than usual and called at the Heaton Park Beefeater at about 8:15 p.m. My sirloin steak was somewhat tougher than usual and I wondered whether the pub chain had been sourcing poorer quality meat from a cheaper supplier. Time will tell. It wasn't until I arrived home that I realised they had, again, missed the bottle of wine off the bill.

The fine weather continued on Wednesday 2nd July, with rain forecast for the foreseeable future, so it was a case of doing as much outside as was physically possible.

Meanwhile, Jenny was preoccupied inside with the return of her tummy bug. I advised her to telephone the doctor for an appointment. They didn't have any appointments available (at Greenmount Surgery one has to know in advance when one is going to be ill and need a doctor) and was told a doctor would telephone her back. The nurse telephoned her back. I surmised all the doctors were too busy checking their payslips. The advice, which she already knew and which I could have given her, was to eat bland foods and drink plenty of water. If the problem persisted until Friday, she was to contact the surgery again. Presumably they would reserve an appointment just in case she needed one? Like the Pope is Jewish.

As luck would have it, Bea, a neighbour, was passing and enquired about Jenny, having been to Matthew and Carrie's wedding, where Jenny was took quite ill in the late evening. When I told her the saga, she said she had some sachets that helped to replace the essential sugars and salts lost through frequent trips to the loo and returned with one that was out of date but which I could take round to the chemist to purchase some. This I did and after just one dose, Jenny felt a lot better.

Now, why didn't the practice nurse suggest those? Perhaps she's still practising. What's more, if Jenny had seen a doctor, she could probably have got the pack of six sachets on a free prescription instead of it costing me £5, not the I can't afford the £5 but had it been someone a lot worse off, the £5 might have been the difference between eating tea and starving. So this is how the new NHS cares for patients is it?

I was considering sending a formal complaint to the NHS about the practice.

I cut the grass on the back and front lawns again and my mind briefly strayed to the advantages of artificial turf, given the frequency with which I had to perform this task. I strimmed the grass edges on the back lawn and tidied up the borders, making a mental note to pick the ripe blackcurrants as soon as we could find the time to make

the jam. Not wanting to let the grass (or moss) grow, I swept all of the block paving I had cleaned so far and then finished cleaning the block paving at the front of the house, leaving just the drive to do.

I then decided to tackle the common land on the side of the house, the council employee having left it in a complete mess. I was finished, in every sense of the word, by 7:30 p.m.

In the evening, I had a long conversation with Barbara, including a quick chat with Edith, up in Redcar. Part of the conversation with Edith involved a letter from the Department of Health about GP registration. Apparently, anyone who is resident in England can register with a GP. So why was Edith told at the Greenmount Medical Practice she couldn't register there because the DoH rules had changed? My guess is that it's because she was 86 years old and they saw her as a liability. Yet more evidence of our caring NHS.

The rains finally arrived with a vengeance on Thursday 3rd July, putting a halt to my external activities, even with a raincoat. I suppose one cannot grumble, having had a summer of near-normal temperatures and some sunshine lasting about a week. The garden certainly needed some moisture and it saved me putting on the sprinkler, not that I could bend down to do so after the previous day's activity.

We managed to fall out of bed around 10:00 a.m. and the morning was spent on Beaver work, probably for the last time, since Jenny was resigning as a Beaver Leader having spent five years running, for the most part, two Colonies every week.

The highlight of my day was dismantling the internals of the fridge so that Jenny could give it a thorough clean. The removal of the bottom shelf above the cold storage drawer did beat me and I gave up trying, not wishing to damage the fridge. I sent an E-mail to Bosch to ask how this task should be undertaken. Needless to say, no-one bothered to respond.

On Friday 4th July we went on our usual grocery shopping spree with a deviation to the weigh-in in Bury to drop off some clothing in exchange for cash. We called at Asda on the return trip, arriving back home in good time for Jenny to go to the last Beaver session she would be running.

We went to the village drop-in on Saturday 5th July, mainly to pay for the woolly jumper Susan had found for me some weeks before and to give Andrew a donation towards the Church renovations.

Lorna came up for a chat because she had not seen Jenny since the wedding. Rachel telephoned to say that she had a fault on her car and we established the best plan was for her to take into the garage as soon as possible.

In the evening, Jenny and I went round to see Brian from whom we had received an open-house invitation to his 40th birthday celebrations. Being a nice day, we went round in our summer-wear only to discover how chilly it was in Brian's back garden, where we were all sat under the gazebo. Even the fire in the pot chimenea next to me

was not sufficient to overcome the chill of the evening. Still, the company and conversation was warm and we enjoyed it.

We went to Church Parade on Sunday 6th July, held, since the Church was closed for repair, in the Old School, the hall of which, had, seemingly, if only temporarily, reverted to its original use.

After a brief lunch, we set off for Redcar to collect Edith and bring her back from Barbara's house where she had stayed for the last week. We had a very nice tea at the Turner's Mill, Redcar, much better than our previous experience, before embarking on the journey home. We managed the trip in both directions in just about two hours, which wasn't bad going, especially since I clocked about 60 m.p.g. The car didn't do badly either.

Rachel had stayed overnight on Sunday to take her car into Tottington Motors on the Monday morning, 7th July, to have her engine fault inspected. I followed Rachel up to the garage and took her into work in Bury. On the journey, I discovered something under my car was catching the floor and it turned out to be the plastic engine cover that had come loose from its mounting. I managed to fix it temporarily, sufficiently to drive back home and I telephoned Glenn at Tottington Motors. He asked me to bring it in about 2:30 and they would look at it. This I did and I suggested we should consider moving in. The engineer fixed the problem while I waited and for free, which was very nice of him. While I was there, Glenn told me Rachel's car was ready and that he would telephone her.

I hadn't been home long before Rachel telephoned from work to say she had heard from Glen and the Greenmount Taxi Service raced into action once more.

We went to do some shopping in Bury on Tuesday 8th July and had a late lunch at Summerseat Garden Centre. One can't visit the Garden centre without looking round and it was going on for 4 p.m. before we returned.

Anne-Marie came round after tea and she and Jenny went off to a Beaver Leaders' Meeting so that Jenny could introduce her to the rest of the Ramsbottom District team as the Leader who would be taking over the Friday Beaver Colony at Greenmount in September.

On Wednesday 9th July, I decided to continue my tidying up outside and I started on the wood under the car port, cutting about another half a dozen bags full of wood, much of which Jenny helped me put into the sacks.

Jenny went for a walk to Summerseat Garden Centre with Gwen on Thursday 10th July. When she returned, we all went into Ramsbottom for a potter round the charity shops where I managed to find a DVD of Zulu for £1.50.

Friday 11th July was far from the routine grocery shopping day. Rachel had stayed overnight to take her car into the garage to have her worn brakes repaired and I followed her up to Tottington Motors to give her lift to work in Bury. I use the term "followed" loosely, in the sense that I left after her and arrived before her. What's

more, I didn't overtake her on the way. To understand why is your first challenge of this month and, as a hint, you need to look at the road layout for postcode BL8 4QD.

While in Bury, I thought I might as well call at the refuse disposal site to, yes, you guessed it, dispose of some refuse.

By the time I was back home, the ladies were almost ready to go grocery shopping. The late start meant a late finish and Jenny and I didn't seem to have much time between arriving back and going out again to the Scout Group Activity Night. Jenny led one of eight mixed teams of Scouts, Cubs and Beavers round a course of eight bases, the theme being the World Cup. I was taking photographs. The children had a great time and it all ended with a plastic ball fight, a tug-of-war and a barbecue on the Sailor's Field. Jenny and I had not eaten any tea and I grabbed a burger before returning home for a supper of beans on toast.

On Saturday 12th July, I awoke with a list. I also had a number of items on a piece of paper from the previous evening I intended to address on this sunny morning.

I managed to enrol Edith with Waitrose and print off a temporary "My Waitrose" card until the official one arrived in the post. Strike one.

I checked my E-mail and dealt with the items requiring no or little action, shelving the one about a local planning application until I had more time. Strike two.

I addressed Barbara's birthday card and left it with Jenny to post. Strike three.

I proceeded to make a list of the TV recordings I had scheduled the previous evening and came to load Windows Media Centre on Jenny's laptop. I thought things were going well. Too well.

Windows Media Centre couldn't find the tuner (a small box connected by a long USB cable) and all efforts to encourage the laptop to do so failed miserably. It was then I noticed that the box was not showing the usual red light. About twenty minutes later, I came to the conclusion the power supply had failed, my meter not showing any reading at the connector, where six volts were required. I wondered if this was due to the violent electrical storm we had experienced recently.

A quick trip into Ramsbottom furnished me with a variable voltage power supply to replace the faulty one at a cost of £11. Thirty minutes later, the new power supply in place, the box burst into life and it was strike four.

Now running well behind schedule, I decided it was time for lunch.

After lunch, I set up my camera on its tripod in the kitchen with my slide projector screen in front of it and a stool in front of that. Before you get become too excited, let me explain that I was taking a passport photograph of Edith for use with her travel pass application. Strike five.

After clearing everything away, it was time to contact Christine and arrange to walk round to her house to fix her scanner, as I had promised to do the previous evening.

Following a brief encounter with Andrew, our Minister and an even shorter one with his dog, on the way, I arrived at Christine's house to find no problem with the scanner. Christine was lost for words, not a common occurrence! I sorted out a couple of other things and she kindly walked me across the "Seller's field", the shortcut back to Brandlesholme Road. Had I taken this route unaccompanied, I may well have been challenged as a trespasser.

I managed to download the passport photographs of Edith from the previous evening to Jenny's laptop before going out to pick the ripe blackcurrants, a task I had been intending to do for the last few days, awaiting sugar, which we had acquired the previous day, so we could make some jam. This would have been strike six but it wasn't on my list.

We reached teatime without any definite plan and given a choice between prawn salad and the Bull's Head carvery, there was no real contest, particularly since Jenny and I both had £5 vouchers. We all had a very nice meal to round off a relatively successful day.

The rains having come, as expected, having had a rare four consecutive days of lovely, warm, sunny weather, we decided not to pack the car for the car boot the following day.

I continued working through my list on Sunday 13th July, printing the passport-sized photograph of Edith for her travel pass application, dealing with my E-mail again, processing the programmes I had recorded from the TV the previous day and early that morning, putting the pictures of the Scout Group Activity Evening on a CD for Richard Gahan and updating the web sites. All that took until mid-afternoon.

The scheduled tasks were interrupted by a jam-making session and we ended up with nearly four jars of deliciously-fruity, blackcurrant jam as a result of our efforts picking the fruit the previous day and Jenny and Edith meticulously picking through the fruit earlier in the day.

On Monday 14th July we set off to Bleakholt Animal Sanctuary, from which we obtained the cats, to ask for suggestions about boarding our cats if we disappeared off to New Zealand for a couple of months. We took the opportunity to drop off some shredded paper for animal bedding and, inevitably, to purchase some items from the shop. We were told about a cattery and also about a cat-sitter.

We decided to go and look at the cattery which was in Haslingden and this involved retracing our route back to Ramsbottom and climbing the hill up to Holcombe Village. The plan was to call at the tea rooms at Holden Wood Antiques but, passing the Shoulder of Mutton at Holcombe Village, someone suggested calling there for lunch instead, so we did, with great expectations, not having been for several years and having heard so much about its good food.

What a mistake that was. The food was nothing special, Jenny's being more decorative than nutritional and it was expensive. It was not a patch on the Red Hall across the valley.

While in that neck of the woods, I decided to call at a fireplace centre in Haslingden to see if they could mend the cracked glass in the door of my Stovax wood-burning stove. Despite it being the middle of the afternoon, the shop was closed. I noted their telephone number.

We arrived at the cattery and it was very nice. The lady said she would work out a price for our two cats for two months, since the usual rate was £8 per cat per night.

We returned home not having achieved a great deal.

Tuesday 15th July was one of those days when one is full of good intentions but achieves little or nothing. Was there a trend developing here, I thought.

I telephoned the fireplace shop in Haslingden and the lady said they did not mend stoves. She suggested I contact a chap called Simon Bryant. I said I already knew him. He had installed my stove. I left a message for him to call me. He didn't.

On Wednesday 16th July, we went to Bury. The first task was to hand in Edith bus pass application, which we did and this was authorised and we were given instructions on what to do next, which was to send it off to Hull. Where else?

We dealt with a few more items on Edith's list before lunching at Leckenby's good, but expensive, tea shop and then a few more afterwards, calling in at Clarks shoe shop where I managed to find a nice pair of casual shoes and finishing up at the Co-operative Travel Agent. Edith had decided to return to New Zealand and we went to discuss flights. We came away with an outline plan and resolved to return to confirm our intentions.

The highlight of my day on Thursday 17th July was cutting aluminium foil to line the trays under the hob burners on the cooker. Now some people might find this something of a chore but the precision in measuring the holes that need to be cut in the foil and cutting neat circles and other odd shapes in the right places is something of an art and it brought back fond memories of my engineering drawing days in the dim and distant past. Not that I was good at it. If I had engineered the channel tunnel and the work had started from both ends to meet in the middle, the two sections would have been miles apart. As luck would have it, everything worked out fine on this occasion.

Friday 18th July was our usual grocery shopping spree to Unicorn, in Chorlton, Waitrose in Broadheath and, on the return journey, Asda at Pilsworth, where, disappointingly, Yellow Tail wine had jumped back up in price, so we didn't buy any. Waitrose was also disappointing in that it had stopped stocking Duchy Harvest Chutney and it had no Nature's Path Nice n' Nobly and no Seeds of Change Indian or Mexican rice.

Back at home, I shopped around the Internet and found a shop that stocked all of the above and other items we purchase as well. The only snag was that it was in Norwich and it shipped out orders by post or courier, which wasn't cheap. Still, most of the items were cheaper than Abel and Cole. We considered kicking both Waitrose and Abel and Cole into touch and using the store in Norwich instead.

We were back at the Co-operative travel agent in Bury on Saturday 19th July with the intention of finalising our trip to New Zealand, the main purpose being to ensure my sister, Edith, returned safely and taking the opportunity to see parts of the country we didn't see the last time we were there and to visit relatives. The initial price for two return fares and a one-way ticket, all with a stop-over in Singapore, in our case in both directions, was somewhat extortionate. After some discussion, we managed to reduce the cost to a more realistic level and we managed to save a few more pounds by selecting an alternative hotel to the one suggested in Singapore. I am sure the last time we went we stayed at The Orchard Hotel and it came as something of a surprise to find this five star hotel was cheaper. We booked our tickets and opted for the travel insurance offered by the agent rather than spend time shopping around.

We spent most of Sunday 20th July at the car boot sale in Ramsbottom. Trading was again slow and we did not do terribly well. We spent the rest of the day recovering from the 5 a.m. start.

Monday 21st July was another nice day and I took the opportunity to tend the garden, the strategy being to keep on top of things, thereby requiring less time to do what was needed. One can do that sort of thing when the weather is good. Nevertheless, it took all day and that still left quite a bit to do. Reflecting on this, I had a quick shower and a beer. The latter put things into their correct perspective.

I went for an eye test on Tuesday 22nd July and passed with flying colours – well, letters on a wall chart, anyway. My right eye seems to have recovered extremely well from the occluded blood vessel and my current glasses were thought to be too strong for me. New lenses were prescribed and I settled on new frames as well.

Despite needing new specs, we looked round Ramsbottom as usual and came home for lunch, after which Jenny and I picked the lovely ripe blackcurrants..

In the evening, I went to the Bull's head and sat outside in the warm, evening sunshine, sipping a pint and talking to Alistair about the arrangements for managing the web site while I was away in NZ later in the year.

Wednesday 23rd July was Jenny's turn for a short trip out. She went to the hairdressers, Cream, in the village. After that, we went to Bury and lunched at the Fusilier Musem café. We pottered round Bury and made the inevitable trip to Tesco.

We finally managed to make the second batch of blackcurrant jam on Thursday 24th July and ended up with another ten jars.

Another grocery shopping day came round on Friday 25th July with the usual trip to Unicorn, Waitrose, including lunch and Asda.

On Saturday 26th July, we had been invited to the home of my nephew and his wife in Leeds for the afternoon. John and Jane had organised a family gathering and Edith, Jenny, Rachel and I met up with them and their children, Laura and David, John's sister, Julie, her husband Keith and their son Robbie, John's brother, Andrew and Edith's and my sister, Barbara. We had a lovely buffet lunch and it was an excellent family gathering. It was a pity that Matthew and Carrie could not be present.

We didn't do a car boot sale on Sunday 27th July because the forecast was not very good. In the event, it did rain overnight but the showers prophesied for the day never matured, so somebody got it spectacularly wrong yet again.

Instead, we decided to start tidying up the conservatory.

I checked out some equipment Matthew had given me for our car boot sale and which had remained in a cardboard box in the conservatory for longer than I can remember.

The major item, a Pioneer, combined, audio/video (i.e. radio and TV) tuner, surround-sound amplifier with five speakers and a sub-woofer, no less and selectable inputs from a number of other external devices (except a record deck, so they didn't think of everything) ended up on the tip consignment when the remote control proved temperamental and the radio tuner failed to scan for stations.

Jenny and I spent some time removing the old Beaver Scout files from the filing cabinet in the conservatory and shredding sensitive documents faster than MI5.

I updated this effervescent saga at the end of a reasonably productive Monday, 28th July, not having had the opportunity since the previous Monday. The bits in between are from my memory of events over the previous week and since my memory leaves much to be desired, the further back I go, the less accurate it probably is. Still, I was sure you would form some impression of our overactive lifestyle and my overactive imagination.

I started the day testing some equipment Jenny's niece, Tracey, had given me to check if it worked. Some of it did and some of it didn't. I suppose you can't say fairer than that, especially if you can't pronounce your f's, t's and h's. The rubbish was packaged for the tip and the good bits boxed for return to Yorkshire, the county from which all good things originate.

I turned my attention to the rest of the equipment Matthew had given me. The Plantronics headset, surprisingly, not only worked but also turned out to be worth a considerable sum, as did the Audyssey microphone. All I needed was a connoisseur at the car boot in Ramsbottom to purchase the items. A challenge not unlike plating fog.

After that, on this still relatively warm, pleasant, sunny day, we took all the files relating to Beaver Scouts we had removed from the custom-made, solid-oak filing cabinet in the conservatory round to the Old School and deposited them in the battered, grey-metal filing cabinet there, merging some of the old files Jenny never used with them.

After lunch, we gave the conservatory a bit of a clean and tidied round, removing everything from it that did not belong there and which most people thought was rooted to the spot, having been there so long. We rearranged the furniture and Edith could not believe the difference it made. We could not only get into the conservatory, but there was room for four people to sit comfortably round the coffee table and drink tea, coffee, beer, wine or whatever else took their fancy (delete as appropriate). There wasn't a cardboard box in sight. This didn't do much for the garage though.

On Tuesday 29th July we had to wait in for the new mattresses for the two single beds to arrive from Housing Units of Hollingwood. Meanwhile, we worked on the plans for our New Zealand trip, which was interrupted by a visit from Mike. We left Mike chatting to Edith while Jenny and I took delivery of said items, unpacked them and put them on the beds.

After Mike left and lunch, I continued with my usual administration work (i.e. didn't do a lot).

On Wednesday 30th July Jenny took us on a mystery tour and we ended up at Helmshore Textile Museum, where we perused the items in the shop. I booked to see 'Trouble at' Mill, a Lancashire folk group, performing at the Museum on Friday 15th August.

After that, we went across the road to Musbury Fabrics for lunch and then a look round the store. I was impressed by the range of goods, soft fabrics and associated furnishings, although I had difficulty in finding items made from 100% cotton or 100% wool. Not necessarily, then, a store for those of us who believe in natural fibres as opposed to contributing to the overflowing coffers of the greedy petro-chemical industry.

On Thursday 31st July, we went to Sheffield and met up with Barbara at Debenhams Coffee Shop, where the tea, it has to be said, is pretty awful, in the Meadowhall Shopping Mall.

The original plan had been to park the car at the Park and Ride at Middlewood and catch the tram into town to meet Barbara at the Cathedral. A £4.50 charge for parking the car and, as we learnt later, a replacement bus service due to tram track upgrades, resulted in stratagem B, i.e. parking the car at the free car park at the Meadowhall Interchange and travelling in from there. This plan was also foiled. There were no available parking spaces in the car park at the Interchange and Barbara had decided it was easier for us to meet up with her and board the tram from the next stop along the line rather than for her to find us and travel from the Interchange terminus.

Alternative manoeuvre C was activated and we parked in the Meadowhall car park and all of us caught the tram as Barbara had intended, once we had found the tram stop.

We wandered the length and breadth of Sheffield city centre with great expectation. What a disappointment. The modern building architecture is an abomination, totally lacking in character and dwarfing the old magnificent buildings like the Town Hall. The Moor had been completely devalued by the modern developments. If I had my way, the whole of the city planning committee would be publically hung, drawn and quartered along with those responsible for the building design and development.

The one shining light of quality and value, deserving of your patronage, in the tacky, steel, concrete and glass wilderness was an organic stall in the new market on The Moor.

As for the layout of the city, there was seemingly no strategy or logic to it and, even with a map, it took us some time to work out where to find a bus to take us from the bottom of The Moor back to the Cathedral. We did eventually find the bus stop, well hidden, round a corner.

All I can say to the people of Sheffield, is that you get what you deserve and if you don't like it, go out and vote for the Green Party in the next election because there's damn all to choose from with the rest.

And on that political note, I conclude another month of observation on life, the universe and everything and, for what it's worth, that includes Sheffield, the town, I am now ashamed to admit, in which I was born and bred.