

Greenmount – July 2017

Saturday July 1st: The day started with a morning at the Old School. Jenny was tending the bric-a-brac stall in Nikki's absence, helped by Frank's wife, Gwen, for the monthly drop-in. I spent the morning testing and pricing electrical jumble for the next jumble sale.

After lunch I tackled the side garden and cut the grass, my work interspersed with conversations with friends and neighbours. I trimmed the edges using a combination of trimmer and shears, trimmed back the ivy on the garage wall and cleaned out more of the garage roof gutter. I would have liked to have finished it but accessing the very front part proved problematic. I decided I needed to erect my step-ladders on the drive and run a plank from them onto the side garden, which was much higher than the drive, so I could walk on the plank to reach the gutter. That was a job for another day since time was getting on and I tidied up, put my tools away and pumped up the tyres on the car for the following day's car boot sale, Jenny and Rachel having packed it in readiness.

Sunday July 2nd: Waking up at 6:05 a.m. to discover that the alarm had not switched on the radio at 5:00 a.m. was something of surprise. We were out of bed quicker than I had known us move for some time, washed, dressed and out of the door without breakfast by 6:30 a.m. to reach our car boot spot by 6:45, which was just as well because most of the pitches were taken. I had discovered that the reason the alarm had not awoken us in time to have breakfast was that I had set it for 5 p.m. instead of 5 a.m. I resolved to find a better alarm device with a 24 hour clock.

We set out our tables in somewhat cold conditions and I was wishing I had put on my fleece over my sweater and under my waterproof and windproof jacket, together with some thermal long-johns. It was colder than in February with a strong NW wind and lots of fast-moving cloud. Fortunately, it did not rain, proving the weather forecast correct, for once. It did warm up towards lunchtime and we had sunshine and blue skies which, I think, helped to boost trading, which started relatively slowly.

We did rather well over the whole day, arriving home for about 4:15 p.m. and the first task was to wash the pots from the previous evening before leaving Jenny to cook our beef stroganoff tea.

I had acquired three DVDs at the car boot sale, one of which was Stagecoach starring John Wayne and directed by John Ford, the film that really launched John Wayne's career and we settled down to watch that before retiring.

Monday July 3rd: We had arranged to meet up with Matthew, Carrie and Carrie's mum and dad for lunch at Owen's restaurant in Ramsbottom but that was rescheduled for tea-time. Matt and Carrie should have been in Spain, starting their holiday by this time but someone had overlooked the need to acquire written permission to drive Matt's lease car in France (which is where they were headed eventually) and they had to rush over to Harrogate to collect it, confusion at the leasing company having led to a failure to deliver the document by courier.

Matthew and Carrie had rescheduled their itinerary and were now scheduled to travel directly to France once they had the necessary documentation.

We rescheduled our morning accordingly and I started with an update to the village web site.

I spent much of the rest of the day helping Jenny with her car booty until it was time to meet up with Matthew, Carrie, Bob and Marie.

Needless to say we were the last to arrive at Owen's Restaurant in Ramsbottom, (not the end of the Universe). It was a place I had, some time ago, decided we would not frequent again and here we were.

I have to say that the food, on this occasion, was very nice and the staff were most pleasant and helpful. I enjoyed my starter of Tempura Prawns, main of chicken breast and sweet of Bakewell Tart, all washed down with a large glass of Chardonnay and because the young man who brought the wine did so after a short delay, he apologised and said he would only charge me for a standard glass, which was very nice of him.

My conclusion was that the restaurant was better at less busy times and being seated at a table on the ground floor was better than being upstairs, which, I thought, was more claustrophobic, particularly when fully occupied.

Tuesday July 4th: I started the day with another Dementia Friends Awareness presentation with Joani at the Skipton Building Society in Bury.

After lunch Jenny and I went to find the timber yard in Middleton Matthew had recommended where we could obtain skirting made to specification, taking a sample of the old skirting with us. We found Ash timber yard on Grimshaw Lane and explained what we required. It wasn't cheap. A major cost was the machining of the cutter to produce the exact pattern match to what we had originally and, once that had been made, they would keep it for future reference so that if we wanted any more skirting, it would be much cheaper to reproduce it. It was going to take almost two weeks before we had delivery of the finished product.

Returning home, I spent the rest of the afternoon recording an LP of 1920s Jazz ready for cutting onto CD.

Wednesday July 5th: It was back to decorating and, since I could not progress the small bedroom until the wood for the skirting arrived, I decided to start on the landing.

The first small job was to screw in the curtain tie-back hooks in the small bedroom after Jenny had cleaned them since they were lying around on the dresser on the landing. With those safely out of the way, I turned my attention to the walls and coving. The plasterers had not made a particularly good job of the coving and I found it necessary to remake the external corners and redefine the internal ones. I could have done a much better job installing the coving myself and it would have saved me some time as well as some money.

I remade the first external corner, which looked quite good and managed to deal with two internal corners, although they would need a little plaster and some further rubbing down. I also sanded two walls ready for washing down and painting, exposing one crack that would need filling and sanding further. I was leaving the plastering until I had finished the sanding, the first stage preparation work. I intended to replace the single 13

amp socket on the landing with a double, switched socket as well and that would also need some plaster.

There was at least another day's initial sanding before plastering and re-sanding the plastered bits and then painting could start, probably next week.

After tidying up, the last job of the day was to oil the opening window mechanism in the small bedroom, having acquired a can of spray 3-in-1 light oil, as recommended by Anglian, from one of the £1 shops in Bury.

During my lunch break, I had started work on the Dementia Awareness Powerpoint presentation amendments Joani had requested on Tuesday and I finished those off in the early evening, printing out the 32 slides for Joani's documentation, along with a summary of the amendments made.

Richard Greenwood called round in the late afternoon to ask if we still needed our bathroom toilet repairing. I said we did and I thought he had forgotten. He had been busy and said he didn't have my telephone number so I gave it to him and he put it in his mobile phone. He spent about a half-hour replacing the bit that fills it with water. That was another job ticked off the long list.

Thursday July 6th: The weather had started to pick up again and it was a lovely warm, sunny morning, the forecast carrying a weather warning for the next 24 hours or so for thunderstorms and very heavy rain causing flash-flooding. When we got nice warm weather we seemed to pay dearly for it.

I spent the day gardening, cutting the grass back and front and trimming the edges. I tidied up the back borders, including the cat's latrine and cleared the ivy from the fence at the back again. I also decided to rid the garden of Herb Robert, a wild flower that seeds itself so much that it spreads everywhere very rapidly, choking other plants.

We lunched outside on the bench once we had deterred the other creatures (ants, earwigs and snails) from using it.

We picked what few blackcurrants were ripe. The harvest from the early blackcurrant bush and from the gooseberry bush had not been good this year.

By about 4 p.m. I had had enough and showered and changed ready for tea and then the village meeting at the Golf Club.

Before tea, I crammed in a brief update to the village web site, adding the documentation introducing the new head of the Pre-school from September.

I walked up to and back from the Golf Club, joining up with three ladies I knew. The main village meeting agenda item was the plan to refurbish the children's play area on the village green and to lay some drainage in the top half of the green and build a pond to take the excess water. The problem was that there was nowhere for the water to drain from the pond and to lay a drain into the main in the roadway, apart from the initial cost, would incur a ridiculous cost of £3,000 a year from United Utilities.

Friday July 7th: We had a pleasant trip down the M60 to Unicorn in Chorlton, along the A56 to Waitrose at Broadheath and back for a change. Although there was a lot of traffic, for the most part, it kept moving apace.

We called at Bargain Booze in Tottington on the way home for some Yellowtail Shiraz and Chardonnay to discover both were back on offer at 2 for £12. I bought 2 of each.

We were home before 3 p.m. and my main task was to put in the TV recordings for the week and tidy up what we had watched the previous week. That kept me occupied until tea-time.

My cough and catarrh were not improving; if anything, they were getting more troublesome. I discovered I had some Vogel Bronchoforce in the bathroom cabinet and I took a dose of that before going to bed.

Saturday July 8th: I had a much better night's sleep than of late and I took another dose of BronchoForce to help keep my cough and catarrh at bay.

We spent most of the day at the Old School working on electrical jumble. A new development in the cellar, where we store our jumble was that the trickle of water that appears from under the bottom of the steps had become much more significant and had we much of the floor from the bottom of the steps towards the boiler room, where there was a drain. Fortunately, it had not impacted on our equipment, having taken the precaution of ensuring that boxes on the floor near the wet area were plastic ones.

Rachel helped Jenny pack the car for the following day's car boot sale in Ramsbottom, for which the weather forecast was fine but overcast with a 10% chance of rain. I was more than a little peeved at our terrible summers of late and the unpredictability of our weather and the accuracy of the forecast could not be relied upon.

Sunday July 9th: We arrived at our usual car boot venue at about 6:40 a.m., somewhat later than planned, to find most of the pitches already taken, it being the week end of the Farmer's Market and the Diesel Week End on the East Lancashire Railway.

We managed to find a vacant spot next to the butty van and set out our stall. Trading was slow to start and the overcast weather did not help, although it was rather warm.

Custom and the weather improved and it was a rather successful day, driving home in warm sunshine at about 4:30 p.m.

Apart from finishing the Radio Times crossword, I did nothing else that was particularly productive, unlike Jenny who prepared a very nice tea, as usual.

Monday July 10th: Well the plan for this morning was to continue with the decorating, sanding the walls and coving on the landing and staircase ready for washing down and painting once any plastering work required had been completed and the double electrical socket fitted.

We didn't crawl out of bed until 10ish and by the time we had showered, breakfasted, washed the pots and dealt with the rubbish, including putting out the general waste bin ready for emptying the following morning, it was almost noon.

I made a start and soon decided it would be better to clear the landing altogether, which meant moving all my tools, paint and accessories down to the dining room and then moving the large chest of drawers downstairs.

I came downstairs to enlist Jenny's help and found her chatting to Dave and Carole from across the road. They wanted to know if I would like some wooden items they were removing from their garage for our fire. I said I would and they brought them across.

I then went out to chat to Dave and ended up giving him some advice about electrical and plumbing work in his garage for his new washer.

After all that, we were feeling peckish and after moving the chest of drawers downstairs and reaffixing one of the knobs on the bottom drawer, we had a bit to eat. That necessitated a brief rest before resuming work at about 4 p.m.

The first task was to bring down the remaining two drawers and then to go outside and sort out the wood Dave and Carole had brought.

This wasn't getting much decorating done.

Tuesday July 11th: We headed off to Matthew and Carrie's house to tend their plants while they were away on holiday. On returning, I recommenced the preparation work on the landing and by the end of the day, I had finished sanding the walls and coving and opened up a large crack in the plaster underneath the window so it was all ready for filling and re-sanding where necessary. That left the coving on the staircase ceiling and two of the three staircase walls to prepare, the third wall having been completely re-plastered. I also needed to do something with the loft access and to replace the 13 amp socket with a double, switched socket. Another annoying little job was to try to free the wire to the internal bell of the house alarm which I should have been able to push up into the ceiling, except that the idiots who put up the coving had stuck it firmly to the underside of the coving.

I had to admit that progress was painfully slow but experience had taught me that about 75% of decorating was the preparation work because without it and the patience that went with it, the finish just looked abysmal.

I knocked off, somewhat shattered at about 4:30 p.m. and gave Jenny some help to work out an organic flour mix to make some gluten-free scones for the dementia café on Friday. Since she was running out of both brown and white organic rice flour, I ordered 3 x 1 Kg of each from Healthy Supplies. Unfortunately, I could not, on this occasion, bulk out the order to anywhere near £50 to qualify for free delivery, costing me nearly £5. Still, it was cheaper than driving over to the health shop in Shiply for it.

I also looked at ordering a Bosch Professional mitre saw and asked the local K-Supplies shop for a price. That came back at almost Bosch list price and I found a heavily discounted price at Axminster Tools and Machinery, the nearest shop being in Warrington, about 20 miles away. I considered going on Thursday if they had one in stock.

Wednesday July 12th: I did intend starting by replacing the single 13 amp socket on the landing with a double, switched socket. Unfortunately, Jenny had not registered that I intended to turn off the power and had started a washing cycle.

I turned my attention to filling in the hole in the plaster that I created yesterday, under the window. I also touched up the coving here and there and a couple of minor cracks and holes around the window.

After cleaning my equipment, the washer had finished its cycle and I switched off the power. Removing the old 13 amp socket and backing box was not too difficult, although it created rather a large hole in the plasterboard. The problem was removing the plaster that had been used to secure the old backing box without damaging the wall on the other side, in the small bedroom, which I had just decorated.

I managed to free up the great chunk of plaster but it was too big to remove in one piece and the problem of how to cut it up arose. I hit on the idea of sawing it up and I looked around for my "L-shaped" saw, the short section being the handle and the long section the blade. I couldn't find it anywhere and after two visits to the garage to search my toolbox, the air turned bright blue. It was a good job Jenny had gone out with Gwen, although, if she had been here, no doubt she would have put her hand straight on it, since I eventually found it on the end of the kitchen unit, wrapped in kitchen-roll.

While my dinner was cooking, I started sawing through the chunk of plaster and removed a section from the top. That didn't improve matters much so I started sawing a section off the left-hand side, taking care not to catch the wires, which, by this time, were live because I had temporarily put the socket back on the end of the dangling wires and reconnected the power, not wanting it to be off too long, thinking of the fridge-freezers.

I left off to finish preparing and have lunch, which had been cooking in the oven, another good reason for reconnecting the power.

After lunch, I finished off painstakingly removing the old plaster from around the old socket. The idiot who had plastered in the socket had also plastered in the cable to the light switch in the small bedroom, which ran up through the stud wall. I managed to free that.

I cut out the hole for the double-socket backing box, switched off the electricity again, filled in the left two-thirds of the bottom of the hole with plaster, glued the box to the back of the inside of the stud wall, wedged the box in place with a long piece of wood to the opposite wall and plastered in the left-hand side and the left half of the top, the box resting on the plasterboard and the filling at the bottom. I had put the wires through a large hole on the box in the lower right and I connected up the new double socket and left it dangling as I reconnected the power.

It was 5 p.m. and there was not much more I could do until the box had set in place so I left it for the following day.

The last job was to tidy up and fetch some plasterboard from the garage loft. The plan was to use that to cover the top right half and right hand side of the large hole that remained by cutting a shape to fit the large hole that remained and then gluing it to the

existing plasterboard before applying plaster to smooth it off if required. That was also a job for the following day.

There was a little more filling and sanding to do as well so I was not going to get round to painting until the following week.

The weather today had been warm and sunny and it was looking good for the following day, at least up until lunch time so if I could make an early start, I thought I would cut the grass for a change.

Thursday July 13th: We were up reasonably early and I had cut all the grass by 11 a.m. It was 11:30 by the time I had tidied up and I was quite pleased that I had finished before the rain was due. That was the rain that never arrived.

I went back to the decorating preparation work on the landing and cut and fitted the piece of plasterboard to cover the hole that remained around the new socket I had installed.

After lunch I spent some time on the computer looking for worm tablets and flea treatment for the cat, which I ended up ordering online at much reduced costs. Since both were only supplied by vets, I had to provide full details of the cat, including her current medication and weight.

Then it was back to filling, sanding and reshaping the corners of the coving on the landing. I also plastered up the plasterboard I had fitted round the double socket.

I finished as much as I could really do by 4:30 and took a well-needed shower, having helped Jenny re-make the bed with clean sheets earlier and also helped sort out the flour mix and recipe for the gluten-free scones she was making for the dementia café the following day.

A chap from Stay Clean called to offer to clean all the outside u-PVC for £150, including the gutters. I booked that for the following day.

Friday July 14th: I spent the morning sorting out a few things on the computer and scheduling the TV recordings for the week. After a quick lunch, we collected Doreen and Alex and went to the Cricket Club where the monthly Dementia Café, D-CaFF, was being held in a marquee on the village green, next to the Club. The theme was a summery one with a demonstration on how to make fruit, alcohol-free cocktails and a summery snack of scones with jam and cream.

After dropping Doreen and Alex back home, we headed off to Prestwich for a short, weekly shop at Tesco, calling first at a chemist near the Heaton Park tram station that stocked a range of Vogel, natural, herbal products. Jenny needed some eye drops and I needed some Saw Palmetto. Both were in stock and reasonably priced. We also found the shop stocked Jenny's Omega 7 tablets and we were offered a discount on those but she did not need any for the present.

That was more or less our day. The chap arrived to clean the u-PVC shortly after breakfast and we left him to it while we went out. He had gone by the time we returned

and the team called round later to arrange payment. The firm, Stay Clean, seemed to have done a reasonable job and they did not use a solvent cleaner.

Saturday July 15th: We were preparing to go to the Old School to deal with some jumble when Jenny noticed that the pointed bit at the end of the trim on the roof of the conservatory was lying between two of our waste bins. Examination showed that it had broken off the trim. The chap who cleaned the u-PVC failed to mention this. I didn't think I would use the company again.

I decided I would contact Anglian to see if I could obtain a replacement trim.

We spent a good five hours tinkering with the electrical jumble, an hour of which was dedicated to trying to figure out what was causing a peculiar problem with the Old School telephone. When telephoned, it would only occasionally give out a ringing tone.

It was one of those days when my mind was wandering and my thinking all woolly. I also felt quite tired.

When we came home, I spent a good three hours updating the village web site and then some time updating the Tottington District Civic Society's web site.

Tea was one of those rare make do and mend occasions.

Sunday July 16th: Despite an early wet start, as we discovered later, it had dried up by 08:30 a.m. and we could have risked a car boot sale, although it would have meant waiting in the car for about two hours until it was dry enough. I was glad we hadn't and we had a bit of a lie-in.

We went out to deliver a leaflet advertising the forthcoming jumble sale and a free afternoon tea in the Old School for those who wanted it.

After that we had a trip to Matthew and Carrie's house to water the plants and generally check everything was alright. We attempted to pick the ripe fruit but there wasn't much of it. It looked like the birds had eaten all the blackcurrants.

On the return trip we called at Tesco in Bury to obtain a refund on a small food item item we purchased on Friday at Tesco in Prestwich for which the "use by" date was last Thursday, something we did not spot at the time. We took the opportunity to obtain three small packs of organic, brown, rice flour to tide us over until our order from Healthy Supplies arrived.

After a late and brief lunch, I spent some time looking for and ordered a few more items from various suppliers on the Internet and then sorted out some items Jenny had been given for her car boot stock.

Monday July 17th: I spent the morning washing the pots, putting out the bins for the following day's collection and taking pictures of the damage to the conservatory I suspected had been caused by the chap from Stay Clean who had cleaned our u-PVC on Friday. I had earlier contacted Anglian Home Improvements and they had asked for pictures of the damage to provide a quotation for repair.

I also telephoned Stay Clean and the chap with whom I spoke, Paul, said someone would call later on that afternoon. No-one did.

I did receive a reply from Anglian: £17.88 for parts, £241.50 for labour and £51.88 VAT, a total of £311.26.

I telephoned the chap about my skirting and he said he had suffered some delays and it should be with me later this week. I said it wasn't a problem because I wasn't waiting for it.

After treating the cat with Frontline Plus, I finally turned my attention to filling and sanding on the landing again.

I finished about 5 p.m. which was when I dealt with my mail and finished processing an Eddie Condon Jazz LP so I could burn it to CD.

I completed the CD later in the evening, merging two Jazz LPs onto one CD. That just left the CD cover to design, which I started.

Tuesday July 18th: I telephoned Esure, my insurance company, to make a claim for the roof repair and that was sorted out within minutes over the telephone. A cheque was in the post.

I telephoned Anglian to authorise payment. That was a little more problematic and I had to ring off and telephone again and wait some time. I did have a certain amount of sympathy with the young lady on the other end of the telephone because their IT systems and/or IT infrastructure seemed to be somewhat lacking and it took a while to process my payment details.

At least everything was sorted and now it was just a question of time. The cost to me, at this time, was the excess of £100.

I spent the rest of the morning and the early part of the afternoon putting some polythene over the hole in the conservatory roof and tying it down. I managed that with Jenny's help. The idea was to prevent rainwater from leaking into the conservatory through the hole left by the broken finial.

Just before lunch, Jenny's Nordic blueberry tablets I had ordered from Club Vits arrived. I had ordered two of the original 60-capsule boxes, each box being one month's supply, Jenny taking two tablets a day. The ones I received were the extra strength 30-capsule boxes with added minerals. In effect, there was not much to choose between them, since Jenny would only need one of the high-strength tablets daily. The reports for these tablets suggested that they improved the eye sight and had a positive effect in respect of macular degeneration.

After lunch, we picked the blackcurrants. To be more accurate, I went into the bushes while Jenny stood on the lawn and held out the colander to receive them. It would have been much more difficult without Jenny's help.

By the time we had finished it was turned 4 p.m. and I ended my day by cleaning out the log fire from the last time it was used, many weeks ago, not that we needed it because the weather had been warm and quite sunny of late.

Wednesday July 19th: We spent the morning picking over and cleaning the blackcurrants – all 3¼ lbs of them. After lunch, we spent the afternoon making jam.

There were a couple of interludes when Jenny's 3 Kg of organic, white rice flour and 3 Kg of organic brown, rice flour arrived and my wood for the skirting arrived. The only issue with the latter was that the chap had delivered 3.9 metre lengths and not the 5.4 metre lengths I was expecting, which meant I was going to have to piece together one of the longer runs in the dining area, something I had done before, twice, in the lounge. The quality of the 5.4 metre lengths at the timber yard was not that good so the chap supplied some extra lengths of 3.9 metres to compensate.

Thursday July 20th: After a night of heavy rain, the polythene on the conservatory roof seemed to have prevented any water ingress.

After the usual morning chores, printing out the labels for the jam and sticking them on the jars, it was back to the landing, with more sanding and filling with significant progress. I started on the staircase ceiling, coving and walls, at the top of the ladder towards the end of the day. Another day or so of sanding and filling should see me ready to start painting at last.

Friday July 21st: I was up and running by 7:20 a.m. and the previous evening's dishes were washed, dried and squirreled away and breakfast was ready by the time Jenny joined me.

The plan was to start our weekly shopping trip early and, for once, all went according to plan, initially.

While I was waiting for Jenny to finish preparing for the day out, I checked my E-mail. The amount of mail I received overnight had reduced considerably from around 250 messages to about 60 and, on this occasion, all of these were junk. I now had my filtering down to a fine art and all these messages never saw the light of day. They were permanently deleted upon receipt so I didn't have to bother with them.

We arrived at Unicorn in Chorlton by about 10:30 a.m. after a fairly easy ride down the M60, delayed slightly by road works in Stretford and Waitrose in Broadheath just before noon.

After a leisurely lunch in the café, where Jenny had her usual banana, having eaten her chicken wrap on the way in the car because Waitrose still did not appreciate some people who visit their café could not tolerate gluten (I didn't think their vocabulary included the word "celiac"), we completed our shopping by about 2:30 p.m. and headed home with a cool box bulging with frozen and chilled goodies.

The M60 was fine until we reached the bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal and from there it was a crawl all the way to the M61 junction, after which the M60 traffic seemed to be stationary. We decided to take the M61 and then the A666 towards Bolton and detour using the scenic route, which was fairly straightforward. It took us about 45

minutes to reach home which was slightly longer than it should have been using the M60 to Prestwich and then the A56 to Bury.

After putting away the groceries and a quick cup of tea, we headed off to the Old School to prepare for the jumble sale. We arrived just as everyone else was leaving. We had a large room to ourselves and Graham had put out tables round the room and said we could help ourselves to additional tables if we wanted, which I did.

There were very few helpers on this occasion, except for the usual regulars on whose shoulders most of the work seems to fall. Jenny and I made countless trips to the cellar to bring up our electrical stock. The water seeping into the cellar from under the bottom step didn't help and this needed some remedial work.

We set everything out on the tables, locked up and came home to discover that the polythene we had put over the conservatory roof had come adrift at the end nearest the house and was no longer covering the hole on the u-PVC in the pouring rain and I wasn't about to deal with it in the wet. Fortunately, the conservatory remained dry throughout the night despite the heavy rain.

Saturday July 22nd: After a restless night and being awoken at about 3:30 a.m. to investigate a neighbour's house alarm, getting soaked in the torrential rain as a result, we were up just after 9 a.m. and heading off to Ramsbottom before a day of jumbling at the Old School by about 11 a.m., a little later than planned.

We were home for about 5 p.m., ready to pack the car for the following day's car booting, except we didn't because the weather forecast had changed to rain for the day.

Sunday July 23rd: It was another full day at the Old School. Apart from dealing with the electrical jumble, I enlisted the help of Andrew our minister and former architect, to inspect the drainage problem in the cellar, where water was seeping out from underneath the steps and the floor was more like a stream bed. We established that there was a covered surface drain by the outside wall, leading into the boiler room, to an external drain. The problem seemed to be that the surface drainage channel had silted up all the way to the external drain and needed cleaning out. It was possible that the u-bend in the outside drain also needed cleaning out. I was reliably informed that this was a DIY job so it was going to be necessary to muster some volunteers to take on the rather unpleasant task. That was a job for after the jumble sale.

We were home for about 5 p.m. with a car load of rubbish for the tip.

Monday July 24th: Our first port of call was the tip on Bury to dump all of the rubbish from the Old School. That took much longer than planned because access to the recycling station had been prevented for health and safety reasons while some collection process by a large vehicle had been completed.

It was turned 11 a.m. by the time we reached the Old School and another long day testing, pricing and selling electrical jumble.

We had tea at the Bull's Head Toby Carvery, joined by Rachel, to round off the day. On the way, our attention was drawn to a police vehicle across the road, where a house had been broken into and an Audi A4 stolen while the owners were away on holiday. This

was the same house at which I had investigated the alarm early on Saturday morning and for which I had heard the alarm again in the early hours of this morning and, being so tired, fell asleep again instead of investigating it further.

It was unlikely, I supposed, that the perpetrators would be caught and found satisfaction in the belief that they would ultimately face divine retribution for their selfish act.

Tuesday July 25th: It turned out to be a long day. My first task was to update the village web site. Having completed that and being the last fine day for some time, according to the forecast, I cut and trimmed the grass on the side, front and back in that order, breaking off for the odd neighbourly chat, lunch and a telephone call from Joani about the Jewish dementia awareness training.

After lunch, before resuming work, I dealt with the small task, which turned out to be a tad more problematic than expected, for Joani. In the end, I could not E-mail the Powerpoint presentation to her contact because the recipient's Inbox was not large enough to accept the 27 MB zipped folder, as I expected.

After finishing the grass, I picked the blackcurrants and few blackberries that were ripe and Jenny found a handful of raspberries.

Our neighbour, John, had been round to borrow my ladders for the afternoon and returned them in good time for me to re-affix the polythene over the hole in the conservatory roof. In the recent bad weather it had become dislodged and I made some alterations to the anchor points on the polythene.

Apart from doing her ironing and another batch of washing, Jenny tended her raised beds, raked and cleaned the cat's latrine, helped me with the blackcurrant picking and conservatory roof and prepared lunch and tea.

I had finished and packed up just before 8 p.m., a few minutes before tea was ready.

Wednesday July 26th: It was 11 a.m. before we made a start on the blackcurrants and about 1 p.m. after we had finished picking them over and topping and tailing them. Jenny weighed them and we were three ounces short of two pounds. I said I would go and see if there were any more on the bushes to make it up to two pounds when it stopped raining.

We had a bit of a rest before lunch.

Having topped up the blackcurrants, we spent most of what was left of the afternoon making and bottling the jam.

I managed to continue the work on organising my pictures on the computer and adding them to my development version of my web site.

My irritating, tickly cough was not getting any better and I had run out of the Vogel herbal cough medicine. The shop in Ramsbottom, Earth Mother, that had promised to order some and telephone me when it came in had not contacted me so I assumed they couldn't be bothered.

Thursday July 27th: It was noon before I was up and crawling, as opposed to running, since I felt achy and tired. Having slept with a folded pillow under my right side, I had a more restful night and my cough seemed to have waned a little but I was not exactly full of beans – more like lead.

I spent a couple of hours finishing off my latest bit of work on my web site and we had a bit of lunch, my sandwich comprising cheese, salad and raw, crushed garlic. That woke me up a bit.

As the day wore on, I started to feel a lot worse and I was coughing constantly. Jenny made me a hot lemon and thyme drink with honey and whisky which seemed to help a little, having a glass before tea and another without the whisky before retiring.

I had spent the afternoon converting another jazz LP to MP3 ready for burning to CD.

Friday July 28th: I had another glass of lemon and thyme with breakfast but I wasn't feeling much better. We called at the chemist in Prestwich for a box of Jenny's Omega 3 tablets before taking the scenic route round the Manchester inner ring road and the A56 to Stretford, where we turned off for Chorlton and Unicorn. After that, we rejoined the A56 and motored on to Waitrose at Broadheath as usual. Lunch there did not improve matters.

We came back the same way, through Manchester, since the traffic was queuing on the Motorway beyond the junction at which we normally joined it. The traffic through Manchester was not much better. This was definitely the world's traffic light capital and I couldn't help thinking how much worse the traffic will become when all the new building work, constructing rows upon rows of apartments, was finished. I was glad I lived in a spacious rural area.

Another glass of lemon and thyme and a chest covered in Vick afforded me a reasonable night's sleep, having put my brain into gear completing half of the previous week's Radio Times crossword before nodding off.

Saturday July 29th: To my surprise, I awoke feeling a little better. Convinced the lemon and thyme was doing some good, I reached for another glass with breakfast only to discover it had all gone. Jenny said she would make me another batch. I finished the crossword over breakfast and, while I was still coughing, it wasn't so bad and I was feeling less tired and a little brighter.

I discovered the cat had lost a small amount of blood from somewhere and I thought one of her claws had grown so long it had punctured one of her pads, so the next job after the routine chores was to trim her claws, something she did not at all like.

I was right. She didn't like it and I wasn't surprised. Three of her front claws had grown into her pads. When I cut them, two remained stuck in her pads and I had to pull them out. They bled quite a bit and we washed her pads with a warm solution of Epsom Salts to clean the wounds for her. She was alright after that – until she went out onto the garden to visit her latrine and we had to clean her pads again. The second time around was not so bad and they had stopped bleeding.

I finally got round to some plaster sanding on the staircase, making good the corners of the coving of which the builders had made a complete mess.

That was followed by more jam making, apricot this time and then more plastering on the staircase. I left off about 5:30 after tidying up with the intention of more sanding the following day since forecast bad weather prevented our car-booting once again. It was time to listen to the recording of Jazz Record Requests.

Sunday July 30th: I started my day by checking my E-mails, something I did occasionally. There was an interesting one from my energy supplier, Atlantic and they were bumping my electricity payment up by £50 a month for the next year. I decided it was time to shop around for someone cheaper and I switched to Bulb, a green energy supplier with a total monthly payment less than the electricity alone at Atlantic.

The next important message with which I needed to deal was the one concerning moving my remaining two web sites to a hosting service with Zen, alongside the village web site. I could then decommission my old Windows 2003 server, saving on the electricity costs and eliminating a single point of failure. What was more, I would no longer need a fixed internet address on my BT broadband service, saving me £5.50 a month and my Networking Consultancy would work properly, so I would no longer need my BT Internet E-mail account, saving me another £5 a month. Since upgrading to Zen's silver service, providing up to 5 web sites and 25 E-mail addresses would cost another £4.80 a month, it was really a no-brainer.

I finally started work sanding the filler I had put on the staircase walls a couple of days previous and continued after lunch. That was followed by more filling and a little more sanding, tidying up just after 6 p.m. and throwing myself into the shower to rid myself of all the dust.

The preparation work was nearing a close and I envisaged paint being applied to the ceiling and coving during the coming week. Actual progress was, at last, on the horizon.

Monday July 31st: We started by taking up all the decorating dust sheets and giving them a good shake outside between the rain showers. We vacuumed the small bedroom carpet and the landing before relaying the dust sheets on the landing and staircase.

I also put up the new lamp shade in the small bedroom. Every little counts.

After lunch, I sanded down the previous day's filling and finished off the remaining bits that needed filling. One more day of sanding and washing down the walls should see the ceiling and coving having its first coat of paint and, being new plaster, that would be a watered down wash to allow it to soak in. A job for another day, since it was 6 p.m. by the time I had tidied up.