

Greenmount – June 2009

Not wishing to brag, it's a long one this month. There has been a lot happening and I guarantee you will find this more entertaining than Coronation Street or East Enders. That's not difficult, really, is it?

Continuing where I left off from last month and what I didn't tell you about the last walk I did as part of the Environment Week, leaving you all in suspense, is that I went in walking sandals and not hiking boots. An insignificant point, you might think. Well not when, despite three or four days of hot, bright sunshine and blue skies, the ground, particularly through the woods at the base of Holcombe Hill, is still very wet and muddy.

My feet suffered a large blister from wearing my old wading sandals for the short morning walk in the Kirklees Valley on 31st May and I applied a Compede blister plaster to the affected area, after bursting the blister, on returning home for lunch. I wore my new, much more comfortable, walking sandals for the longer, afternoon walk and, my sandals, feet and legs (yes, I wore shorts as well) were covered in mud.

After ten minutes in the bathroom, I had successfully transferred the mud from my lower limbs to the bidet, an extremely useful bathroom item for washing feet as well as other, unmentionable parts. The mud on my sandals was a different story and had to wait until the following morning, when I donned them once more for the Tuesday walk, thus transferring their dried mud to the kitchen floor and thereby creating a useful employment opportunity for Jenny's time.

The Monday morning, 1st June, where this update should really begin, offered me the challenge of a twelve mile hike onto the top of Holcombe Moor via rocky Redbrook or a three mile meander with Jenny and several other local ladies through the local Two Brooks Valley. I chose the latter.

The gentleman leading the walk warned us that it would be wet and muddy. I had, by now become accustomed to thick, dirty liquid oozing into my sandals and between my toes. At least it kept my feet cool. Although it was not as bad as the previous day, I was not disappointed.

Although we know these walks very well, the scenery remains as beautiful as ever and one always views it as though one had never seen it before. As the Moorland Magic DVD says, "how lucky are we to have all this on our doorstep". Copies are still available for purchase.

I often think back to my younger days, rambling with friends on Kinder Scout and over Bleaklow and even further back to walks with my mother in Derbyshire and, as a young child, through Beeley Woods with my big sister, Edith. There is no substitute for being able to walk onto the moors, to both familiar places and to places one has never been and to be able to explore anew.

And so, on Tuesday, I joined a party exploring the world of carpet production at the local factory owned by Cormar Carpets. The visit began at their Ramsbottom factory, followed by lunch at their Greenmount premises and a tour of the works there. The

speed at which they manufacture carpets makes one wonder where it all goes. Much of the demand these days seems to be for light-coloured, tufted carpets.

This area, from the late 18th century to the 1900s, was full of mills and weaving sheds, first water-powered, then steam-driven and, those that survived long enough, converted to electricity, the main output being paper and cotton cloth. Much of the area occupied by the earlier settlements is now private farmland, or given over to conservation, criss-crossed with public footpaths. Some of the area is contaminated with harmful chemicals from dyes and, as such, has been left to nature to break down and adsorb the compounds. Ruins and faint traces of the early farmsteads, settlements and factories still exist but the beauty of the environment conveys not one iota of the misery of many who were slaves to the dark satanic mills, even those who owned them.

It is thanks to this industry that schools were started and churches built and many of the children who would not otherwise have received any education were taught to read, write and do arithmetic, a far cry from the illiteracy of today.

On Wednesday 3rd June I went to visit Queen Street Mill in Burnley, about half an hour's drive away. This is the last remaining, steam-driven, working mill in the country, although it now only has two weavers and only one weaving machine operational and is operated as a museum by the local council. It offers no competition to Cormar Carpets.

We were given a guided tour, starting with the horizontal steam engine. The splendour of these relatively quiet, giant engines and the unique smell of a mixture of steam and oil bring tears to one's eyes and stains to one's clothing.

The next stop was the boiler room and a talk from the boilerman about the working conditions when the mill was operated commercially. The boilerman had two shovels, one clean and one dirty. The clean one was for cooking food such as bacon and eggs in the furnace. The dirty one was for stoking the boiler and for other purposes I shall leave to your imagination. Suffice it to say he did not have time to leave his boiler to go to the toilet and hot furnaces are capable of burning items other than coal.

One of the most impressive items of the tour was a visit to the weaving shed, full of (wait for it) weaving machines. The remaining shed comprises one third of the capacity when the mill was working commercially. We were told that one weaver would manage eight looms and children would be employed to tidy and fetch and carry. None of the machinery is guarded and accidents and deaths were frequent, especially amongst children.

Today, one loom is used to weave cloth and there are only two trained weavers. The noise, even with only one machine working, makes it impossible to speak to each other and it is no surprise the women learnt to lip read. Deafness due to prolonged exposure to the noise and breathing disorders as a result of the dust, in later life, were commonplace.

The mill shop sells items made from the cloth it weaves and takes bespoke orders, if you can afford to pay for them.

On the evening of the 3rd, we went to a gathering at an old farmstead called Boardmans in the neighbouring village of Hawkshaw to learn something of the history of the location, the area dating back to the 16th century. Boardmans is now converted to a series of self-contained cottages in a rural setting for letting and the main house, occupied by the owners.

On Thursday, 4th June, I went on a 3 mile circular, nature walk from the Hare and Hounds at Holcombe Brook, having walked the mile or so there and home afterwards. The nature walk, led by the local ranger, explored the tree and plant life in Redisher woods and the moorland beyond, after a steady climb to reach it. Following my experiences of wet ground earlier in the week, I had wisely donned hiking boots on this occasion.

I repeated the same round trip, led by the same ranger, this time with Jenny, in the evening, to look for nocturnal wildlife (there used to be plenty of that on Wincobank Hill, in Sheffield, where I grew up) and, in particular, bats, for the purposes of which, the ranger handed out audio bat detectors.

The ranger had laid traps earlier in the day and of the nine he had set, two contained mice, one of which escaped before we could examine it closely. The success rate so far was about 12%.

It was not until nearing the end of the walk, as the sun had set, which is quite late this time of year, that we detected the bats and, against the fading light of the blue sky, managed to catch glimpses of them as they darted across the clearings in the woods.

At the end of the walk we had the opportunity to see a bat at close quarters. A lady ranger, who had assisted on the walk, had a bat in a cage in her car and she brought it out to show to us. The bat had been injured and was recovering before being released into the wild. She was keeping it at home and exercising it in her front room. When asked about bat droppings, she quite calmly explained that they are very powdery and crumble away. It is best if one does not have a light coloured carpet though. This lady will not, I think, be buying carpets manufactured by Cormar.

Friday is our grocery shopping day and we were unable to participate in the 3 mile walk in the morning, entitled "Old Tottington" followed by refreshments at Greenmount Golf Club, thereby missing a free pint. I obviously misjudged my priorities.

We had planned to join the 4 mile walk in the evening, entitled "Gone are the Dark Satanic Mills" but the weather turned nasty and we had some heavy rain. It did clear up in time for the walk at 6:30 but we had started tea by then and decided to rest instead.

The week end saw the close of the Tottington District Civic Society Environment and Community Week, with photographs and displays at the various village community centres, including Greenmount Old School and a circular five mile Treasure Hunt between the villages of Greenmount, Tottington and Hawkshaw. Unfortunately, the

weather in this sunniest month of the year was, once again, more like the wettest month of the year.

The following week saw not only a lack of progress with our lounge fireplace project but a definite backward step. The builder we had arranged to knock a hole in the lounge wall and build the chimney, who should, by now have more or less completed the construction, had not even commenced the work. What is worse, he had not even returned my telephone call. And this is the father-in-law of the owner of Burning Desires from whom we are purchasing the fire.

As luck would have it, a couple across the road have just had exactly the same work completed and we asked for the contact details of their builder. It seems he is the chap who is working on her sister's house, a little further up the road on the opposite side and the work he has done looks very good. What the lady of the house also told us is that she has heard that Burning Desires is in financial trouble and might be less desirable than its name suggests.

The builder came to look at the work and told me about all the problems facing the development. That was just what I needed to hear. It is all a case of positioning the fire so that the flue goes straight up the chimney, a highly recommended strategy. After some discussion and consideration, I arranged for the builder to meet with the man who is scheduled to fit the fire, if we ever get that far.

On 11th June I attended the eye clinic at Fairfield General Hospital again. We were fortunate enough to avoid swelling the coffers of the car park Mafia, as someone who was leaving gave us their ticket with two and a half hours left on it.

After a thirty minute wait, I was summoned into a small room where a nurse gave me an eye test, yet again and then administered the drops that make my eyes pop out on stalks. The associated stinging pain is an added bonus for which there is no extra charge.

Given another fifteen minutes to allow the drops to do their work, I was summoned by a young lady who looked nothing like Mr Khan. She was taller. I suppose she must have been his pupil and I wondered whether her name was Iris and whether, when absent, she was paid a retina fee.

She stared into my eyes through the usual apparatus and I stared back at a bright light. Although she was pleasant enough, we didn't really see eye to eye.

A few minutes later she told me my eyes were fine and I was discharged. Jenny had to drive home because the drops had blurred my vision and in the occasional ray of bright sunshine between the dark clouds, this being the sunniest month of the year, I could not see for the light.

The following day, the chap designated to install my lounge, log-burning stove met with the provisionally newly-appointed builder and in the interim I had contacted Stovax, who make the Stockton 5 stove, to obtain some technical information. We have resolved the flue problem by venting from the back of the stove instead of the top and I awaited the builder's quotation and his earliest start date. There were a

couple of outstanding issues, since nothing is ever simple. First, I needed to amend the stove order by adding a 'T-piece' to allow for the rear venting. Nothing so complicated could evolve naturally. Second, the tiled hearth is some 200 mm short of reaching the back of the inglenook. I informed Burning Desires.

The evening of the 12th afforded us an opportunity to join the second of the June, local, evening walks, held each year in an attempt to use as many of the local, public footpaths as possible in order to keep them open. The two-hour excursion took us round the lanes and paths just above Hawkshaw village and back via Two Brooks Valley.

Heavy showers on the following Friday persuaded us, wisely, to stay at home. Those who did venture out down the Kirklees Valley were slightly damp on their return.

Three significant events occurred during the following week.

First, it seems the local newsagent applied for planning permission to extend his shop, to bring the front forward to the edge of the footpath on Brandlesholme Road. While this was refused by the local planning committee, he has appealed and we had until the end of June to object to the appeal. The decision, it seems, is being made by some official in Bristol who obviously knows almost as much about Greenmount as I do about brain surgery.

Second, asbestos insulation has been found under the stage and in the cellar of the Old School. This has been inspected and the initial verbal report is that it is not a problem unless it is disturbed, so all the access to it has been sealed for the present. Arrangements are being made to have it removed for convenience.

The ladies (I use the term loosely) who run the local play group seem not to be satisfied with this and have taken it upon themselves, not only to start rumours that the Old School has to be closed for safety reasons but also to report the matter to the local Environmental Health department, which, under the circumstances, is not strictly necessary and, in any case, is not their responsibility. Mountains and molehills spring to mind. Fortunately, the rumours appear to have been quashed for the present and I am pleased to say Jenny had a full attendance at her Beaver meeting on the 25th.

Third, the builder I approached has agreed to start work on my chimney "soon" and has given me a "ball-park", verbal price with an agreement that he will tell me in advance if the price is likely to increase as he progresses the work. I now know that it is more involved than at first thought.

I spoke to Burning Desires about delivering the hearth and the surround for the builder to work with. Apparently they do not deliver. The fire fitter collects the items from them and installs them. In this case, the builder is going to have to collect them. He doesn't know that yet.

The solution to the hearth not fitting to the back of the opening being created is to be resolved by Burning Desires supplying some matching hearth tiles and fitting these separately. This is another job for the builder, methinks.

On the 26th, we had a beautiful, warm summer's evening (I've almost forgotten what they were like) for the walk round more of the footpaths, this time round Turton Road, past an ex-councillor's sprawling dwelling. The gentleman in question has been noticeably lax in having Public Footpath signs erected to mark the path the goes past his front door and along the side of his building. Obviously a public-spirited chap and just the kind of man one needs as a councillor.

Many of these paths are overgrown with brambles and nettles, or, at least, they were until our large party, swelled by the Friday night Beavers and Cubs, had trampled them down.

Returning by crossing the main road and Two Brooks Valley gave some of the young lads an opportunity to uproot some Himalayan Balsam which is the scourge of the local countryside and much loved by bee keepers who know no better.

During the walk, Jenny, wearing shorts, was bitten or stung on the inside of the right knee and this came up in a red blotch. She tried applying an after-bite pen and then some anti-histamine cream but neither resolved the problem and it became worse. On the Saturday, we went to the NHS Walk-In centre in Bury and the nurse slapped two large iodine patches on the area, drew round it with a pen and told her to rest it, with her leg up for a week and if the inflammation spread to go straight to the A&E department at the local hospital. She was also given a week's supply of antibiotics.

On the Sunday afternoon, the inflammation seemed to extend beyond the artificial boundary, drawn on Jenny's leg, so we decided to picnic in the A&E department at Fairfield General Hospital. A twenty-minute wait in the queue to reach the reception window did little to improve matters and being told by the triage nurse that her immune system must be low did wonders for Jenny's morale. Another couple of hours of utter boredom, unintelligible music issuing forth from ceiling speakers competing with two televisions, both showing the same programme, one receiving analogue signals and one receiving digital signals, thereby being about thirty seconds out of synchronisation and screaming children would have rendered us both eligible for a brain transplant were it not for being rescued by a doctor calling Jenny's name.

After relating the relevant events of the previous two days in some detail, the doctor diagnosed cellulitis, ripped off the iodine patches, prescribed a second course of antibiotics and said it was nothing to do with her immune system and that there was no need to rest with her leg raised.

So that's one for and one against. Jenny, with the casting vote and feeling much better after two days of antibiotics, was walking around normally and rattling like a can of marbles. The redness seemed to be subsiding.

The unscheduled outing to the hospital delayed Matthew's plans to relocate his server, providing the www.networking-consultancy.com web page and my E-mail service, in my conservatory. This should be completed soon and will cause some disruption to the aforementioned facilities.

Once the server is installed next to my desk, I shall be able to improve my web service and dispense with all of the uncertified security issues experienced at present. I shall also try to have Google list my web page in its search engine. Fame at last.