

Greenmount – June 2015

Monday 1st June was the day I actually managed to speak to the tax man and I have to say he was quite helpful, except that he gave me some duff information about my being able to transfer some of Jenny's unused personal allowance to me so I could offset my tax against it. He was not aware of the new legislation for 2015 that would allow me to use £1,000 of Jenny's unused allowance to save me £200.

It did necessitate me hanging on the telephone for over 30 minutes, listening to obnoxious music while somebody became available and I did have to go through the worst automated, voice-recognition filtering process I had ever experienced before I even reached the queue and I whittled the time away compiling a complaint to my MP and sending a rather stern E-mail to the help desk.

The result of the call was that everything would be resolved and I decided to wait and see what the following couple of weeks brought.

Being a wet day for the most part, we decided to resume operations in the small bedroom and set about laying the dust cloths that had been removed for cleaning, having been full of plaster dust and such. After lunch, we set about washing the ceiling and walls down with sugar soap to remove dust, grease, dirt and grime and then washing that off with clean, cold water. Several buckets of black sludge went down the drain and we finished by 5:30 p.m.

What a productive week this was becoming.

The first task of the day on Tuesday 2nd June was to investigate a problem Christine was having sending mail to the local Lancashire Living magazine. It transpired that there was a problem with the server they used.

After breakfast, it was tidy the house time in preparation for the expected visit from Jenny's niece Tracey and nephew Simon. That done, I updated my web site with the previous month's events and the village web site. I finished just as our guests arrived.

We lunched and chatted for most of the afternoon, taking some time to unpack Simon's van and store yet more car boot stock in the empty trailer in the garage in preparation for sorting and pricing.

Rachel joined us for tea at the Bull's Head Toby Carvery and we came home for a cup of tea/coffee before Tracey and Simon departed for Sheffield.

I was up early on Wednesday 3rd June to take the car in for its annual service and I walked back from Tottington in the early morning sunshine and cool wind.

I was going to clean the patio but I did not really feel up to it and helped Jenny with her car boot stock instead, breaking off at about 4 p.m. to fetch the car back after Glenn from the garage had telephoned to say the car was ready for collection.

The one unexpected piece of work was a repair to the exhaust system. Since the exhaust was the original one and the car was just over 11 years old, I couldn't grumble. The

likelihood was that it would need a new catalytic converter in the next year or so and they were not cheap. For the present, the bill was large enough.

Thursday 4th June was a much better day. Not only did I feel better but the sun shone, the sky was blue and it was warm. Summer had arrived and, with any luck, it would last for at least a couple of days.

I spent the day gardening again and managed everything that needed doing except removing the ivy that had grown through the fence at the back. That and cleaning the block paving was still on my list of immediate outdoor activities. Mind you, priorities did change, depending on the circumstances.

Friday 5th June gave rise to the usual shopping trip to Unicorn at Chorlton and Waitrose at Broadheath, near Altrincham.

Saturday 6th June saw us at the village drop-in where, after storing away some jumble I had been testing at home, I was asked to take charge of the sale of DVDs, Frank, who normally managed this department, being unavailable.

We came home for lunch and I helped Jenny pack the car for the following day's car boot sale.

We were up at 4:30 a.m. on Sunday 7th June and at our pitch at Ramsbottom Station Car Park for about 6:30 a.m. Apart from people setting out their stalls, the place was deserted and I had seen more life in a graveyard. Nothing much happened until around 9 a.m. when people started to appear in one's and two's and that was very much the story of the day. Trading was so slow it made snails look like potential Grand National winners. At least there was a steady trickle of customers and we made a reasonable profit on the day. Our good friends, John and Lynn turned up in the next bay to us and their company brightened up what would otherwise have been a relatively boring experience. As John put it, the gathering of traders on Sunday mornings needed more foot-fall, otherwise the long-standing market would disappear as traders went elsewhere in search of more lucrative pickings.

We did have the opportunity to talk to Carrie's mum, Marie and she updated us in respect of Carrie's accident the previous evening at the roller-skating rink in Bury where she had fallen and suffered a compound fracture of her right leg. Carrie was in an Oldham General Hospital bed sporting a temporary pot awaiting a date for an operation to properly reset the fractures. Apparently, there was a week's waiting list for the operation. So much for the caring NHS that was safe in the Conservative Government's hands.

We were home for about 3:30 p.m. and I fell asleep until tea was ready.

On Monday 8th June, Jenny pottered about in the garage, not that there was much room to do so, expanding onto the drive, emptying the car from the previous day and sorting out her car boot stock ready for the following Sunday.

In between helping Jenny, I dealt with a letter I had received from the tax man summarising what he had done and I compiled a reply. I checked my bank account to find the amount I was due had been repaid.

I also registered Jenny's interest in transferring some of her personal allowance to me.

All that and tidying up a few other loose ends took all day.

I had arranged to meet Donna at the Incredible Edible plot at 10 a.m. on Tuesday 9th June for a chat about the rockery development. Dave and Frank joined us and Dave ended up doing a bit of weeding and strimming the long grass round the rockery location. I helped tidy up a bit, wishing I had brought my gloves and a few tools.

We decided we needed two one tonne bags of soil for the rockery and settled on a proper working session on the next Tuesday.

We also had a chat about parking on the unmade road leading to the IE plot and, more importantly, about parked vehicles that obstructed the footpath along the main road. I offered to send an E-mail to one of our local councillors asking for help to solve this problem.

I also decided to try to find time to do a bit more tidying up around the rockery before the following session, for which I would need a power supply and the nearest source for that was the church. I said I would ask Andrew, our minister, about it.

Back home, I dealt with the parking E-mail before an early lunch and afterwards, we set off in the direction of Bury, dropping off some jumble at the Old School. Our next stop was to dump some rubbish at the tip and then we went on to Heap Bridge to the clothing weigh-in. That was closed and left us with a car load of clothes in plastic sacks which we could have well done without.

It was on to Asda for some groceries and, even though Yellow Tail wine was nearly £7 a bottle, we needed some and grudgingly bought two bottles of Chardonnay and two of Shiraz.

My next stop was PC World, where I dropped off Jenny so she could go to the health food store in the market for more goodies.

It was PC World that had a go at fixing Jenny's laptop, had it a month and gave it back to me in normal working order, having found no fault, for a fixed fee of £50 on a no fix, no fee basis. That was back at the end of February. The same problem with the laptop had recently reoccurred. Did PC World want to know? No they did not. I couldn't have my money back because it was more than three months since they "fixed" it – except they didn't. So much for no fix, no fee.

This was not turning into a particularly successful day, especially when we got to Tesco and discovered Yellow Tail Chardonnay was only £5.16 a bottle. I bought a box of six. The Shiraz was still expensive though.

Enough was enough and we came home with a boot load of shopping, a still-faulty PC and about a tonne of plastic bags full of pre-owned clothes.

Matthew had sent me a message earlier to say Carrie was having her operation in the afternoon, which was good news. Another message arrived as we came home to say she was still in theatre.

Frank had invited me to join him and Mike for a potter about the moors on Wednesday 10th June and I arrived at Frank's house for 9 a.m. Frank's wife, Gwen, gave us a lift up through Holcombe village to the footpath that led up through Buckden Wood, which we took and climbed up to the large dirt track at the top, where we turned right. Following this to the junction with the track that led up to Pilgrim's Cross, we turned sharp left up to the Cross and then right, along the narrow, downhill path to join Moorbottom Road. We turned right and walked on past Redbrook to find a suitable bank on which to rest and eat an early lunch before continuing on to the maggot farm. There we turned left, over a style, to follow a path downhill and weaved our way along the valley by the stream to emerge on the main road at Hawkshaw village. Crossing over and picking up the path down past the tennis club, we turned left and walked along Two Brooks Valley, taking the path left, up the short, steep climb, then turning right to cross the large field, we came down through the wood to the golf club. It was then just a short walk across the golf course and past the church to the pub for a welcome pint or two before returning home, having covered about 9 or 10 miles.

I followed up on the exercise on Thursday 11th June by mowing and strimming all three lawns, tidying up the borders and cutting back the ivy that was protruding through the back fence.

Friday 12th June turned out to be a variation on the usual theme, with a failed attempt to drop off some bags of clothing for cash at Heap Bridge. The place was closed again. From there we went to visit Matt and Carrie, Carrie having returned home from hospital during the week following the operation to reset her leg she broke while roller skating the previous Saturday. On leaving Matt and Carrie's house, we attempted to drop off the clothes at another weigh-in centre on Dumer's Lane but that was closed too and we were told to come back at 10 a.m. the following day. It was 11:30 before we set off on our usual shopping trip proper and we were not home until about 4 p.m.

We did as we were asked on Saturday 13th June. The clothing dump on Dumer's Lane was open but they were not accepting any more clothes because they had no cash. We called in at Matthew and Carrie's house again to drop off some mail. Matthew was working and Carrie had her mum, Marie, for company. Marie told us that a new clothing point had opened in the yard of the bankrupt firm, Tracey's in Bury. We called in there on the way home and finally disposed of our car load of goods, except for a few rejected items which we took to the tip.

We arrived back in Greenmount at the pub, just in time for Faith's birthday celebration at noon, except the pub was just about empty. Popping across to the Old School, we found Christine and she informed us we were a week early. The celebration was the following Saturday.

I spent the afternoon just pottering about the house, tidying up here and there.

We decided not to go to the car boot sale on Sunday 14th June because the weather forecast was not good. Instead we went out to spend some money. We went down to John Lewis at the Trafford Centre with the intention of buying a new DVD player. I bought a Sony BDP-S3500 blu-ray player and we had lunch in the store. Suitably refreshed, I bought a second LED floor-standing lamp, identical to the one I bought for Jenny, to brighten up my life and my chair in the lounge at the risk of losing another arm and leg. As if that weren't enough, I bought myself two packs of cotton socks as well.

The DVD player had not come with an HDMI cable so I stopped off at Asda for one on the way back, their prices being lower than the one's at John Lewis.

Back home, I set about installing and playing with my new toys. Apart from needing a degree in IT to set up the DVD player and the player requiring a firmware update over the Internet, I found it fairly easy to install, but, then, I did have a lifetime in IT support and network design, installation, configuration and troubleshooting. Jenny thought it was all too complicated. I had to admit that media devices had become very technical and it was no longer a case of plugging them in and pressing a few buttons. I blamed it all on Java.

Monday 15th June finally gave me the opportunity to go to Scan Computers in Bolton to purchase the memory I needed to repair Jenny's laptop. Unfortunately, I never made it. Instead, I spent $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day resolving exactly what type of memory I needed because, it transpired, that the memory I was going to use from Scan was the wrong specification. I never realised how many variants of laptop memory there were and what I wanted seemed, as usual, to be as rare as rocking-horse droppings. I finally found the last item in stock online at Crucial. Their web site downloaded and ran a very helpful piece of software that identified the type of memory I needed and took me directly to the web page I needed so I could place my order. It wasn't until after I had done so that it occurred to me that the voltage of the memory I had ordered was 1.35 volts and, according to another piece of software, CPU-Z, the memory I had in the computer ran at 1.5 volts. I decided to send Crucial an E-mail to double-check their software had not made a mistake.

I thought I might as well catch up on more administration work, scanning and filing documentation. It was amazing how much paperwork a day's shopping could create. There were receipts to put into the accounts and file, guarantees to scan and store on the computer, the equipment inventory to update; the list was almost endless.

I was at the Incredible Edible plot for about 8 a.m. waiting for two tonnes of soil on Tuesday 16th June. Donna had ordered the soil for the new rockery and I needed to ensure there was room for the lorry to drive in and dump the two bags of soil where some people would normally park their cars.

Donna arrived about 8:30 and the lorry load of soil a few minutes later. I left Donna to deal with that while I nipped across to the Old School to borrow Christine's church keys, receiving the third degree from one of the Play Group ladies as I went down the corridor. I found Christine in the kitchen but her keys were with the plumber so I had to call Andrew, our minister and he kindly drove up and arrived at the church about ten minutes later. He opened up, showed me where the power socket was so I could use my strimmer at the plot and left me to return the key to The Manse when I had finished.

Using an extension lead I had borrowed from the Old School fed through the church side door and over the railings, I strimmed as much of the overgrown grass round the location of the rockery as I could. Frank arrived and we barrowed nearly two tonnes of soil to the rockery, placing it and the stones we had collected according to Donna's directions. Tracey arrived about 11 a.m., as usual and I came back home for my bow saw and cut off some low branches of the conifer behind the rockery. We positioned the remaining stones round the back, leaving the whole of the grassy area to be strimmed

properly. I also strimmed the edges down the path while Tracey tidied up the weeds between the raised bed and the fence.

We cleared away a whole load of old cuttings from under the tree as well as the branches we had cut off and put all the rubbish into the empty sack from the soil delivery. I said I would collect it with my trailer and take it to the tip in Bury.

I left about noon to take Andrew's key back and drop off the extension lead at the Old School and arrived home just in time for lunch.

The memory for Jenny's laptop had arrived and it was definitely the wrong voltage so I spent some time sorting that out and arranging a return for a refund. I was not best pleased with Crucial.

We went down to Scan where I purchased a 2 Tb disc for my desktop computer, the strategy being, after the failure of one of my 250 Gb drives and having copied all of their contents to an external 2 Tb drive, to replace all of them with a 2 Tb internal drive.

I had previously checked with Scan that the new 2 Tb SATA III drive would work on my old Windows XP desktop with SATA II interfaces. The answer was that it would. It didn't, at least not initially. The disc was not recognised by the Silicon Image RAID BIOS. I managed to load the computer by unplugging the SATA cable and then, when Windows XP had loaded, I reconnected the cable and Windows found the disc. I was able to format the drive, which took hours and copy some data to it before retiring for the day.

Wednesday 17th June being a wet day, I postponed cutting the grass and concentrated on copying my files to my new disc on the desktop computer. The BIOS would still not recognise the disc and the load up procedure was the same as before, except that when I connected the SATA cable, Windows did not detect the disc. I had to go into Disk Management, where the disc was listed but inactive and reactivate it. That worked and I continued copying my files. It was a problem that needed resolving but at least I had a work-around for the present.

The copying process took a while and I was able to intersperse that with updating the village web site and that for Tottington and District Civic Society. What a versatile chap I am.

After a brief lunch, we went up to the post office in the car to send the memory back to Crucial and, although I had received a Freepost address, I sent the package recorded delivery with tracking to make sure it arrived safely, at some cost to myself.

We called at the Incredible Edible plot on the way back to pick some spinach to accompany the Lasagne for tea.

The rain held off on Thursday 18th June and the plan was to walk into Ramsbottom until we had an unexpected visit from Rachel which came as a pleasant surprise.

While waiting for Jenny to ready herself, prior to Rachel's arrival, I resumed the task of copying my files onto the new 2 Tb hard drive on my desktop computer and I had managed to make the computer load and Windows recognise the new disc by placing it on a SATA connection not managed by the Silicon Image RAID chip. My motherboard

had two types of SATA connection with two connections directly onto the motherboard and four more controlled by a Silicon Image RAID chip and it was the latter that was giving rise to the problem.

For a break and a breath of fresh air, we drove into Ramsbottom after lunch and toured the charity shops. Finding nothing there to purchase, we went to Tesco for a 12-pack of 500 ml bottles of Highland Spring Water Jenny said was on offer at £2. It wasn't. We came home empty-handed.

I finished off copying my files and then put one of the original 250 Gb discs to good use by configuring it as a back-up system disc. The challenge was then to copy all the Windows files and the Master Boot Record onto it.

I downloaded a piece of free software called EaseUS Todo which seemed to have a good reputation and was supposed to clone one disc or partition onto another. Time would tell.

We went grocery shopping on Friday 19th June as usual and the trip was limited to Unicorn in Chorlton and Waitrose at Broadheath, Altrincham as usual. The plan to call at Summerseat Garden Centre for more organic top soil for filling in the borders here and there was abandoned on account of the forecast for rain for the foreseeable future.

On returning I did manage to find time to play with EaseUS Todo and it turned out not to be so straight forward.

On Saturday 20th June we set off to visit Hebden Bridge. We reached Todmorden and decided to potter round there instead, having been once before, to the organic shop. It was like any other small market town, seemingly suffering, perhaps, more than most from the wealth needed to sustain what were once thriving communities, thanks to the obsession of politicians since the 1960s with greed and power, since when serving the interests of large businesses started to take priority over serving the people.

The organic shop was, thankfully, still thriving, except that many of the lines it used to stock had disappeared from the shelves.

Sunday 21st June was another day of playing with my desk-top computer. In actual fact I was reorganising my discs after backing up all my media data to the new 2 Tb disc. I removed all the redundant discs, leaving one spare SATA disc on which to back up my XP system.

Rachel arrived about 6 p.m. with her Matthew and Matthew arrived minus Carrie, who was still nursing her broken leg at home, shortly afterwards. Rachel and her brother, Matthew (it is somewhat confusing, is it not?) treated Jenny and me to a Father's day meal at the Red Lion, Hawkshaw and Rachel's Matthew joined us, his parents being away on holiday. The meal was alright but nowhere near as good as it used to be before the pub was taken over by J. W. Lees and certainly not as good as the Wagon and Horses, which did not serve food on Sundays. Even the Bull's Head Toby Carvery at Greenmount scored better when it came to vegetables with the main course.

On Monday 22nd June I purchased a copy of Acronis True Image and backed up my desk top system disc, having failed to do same with the available freeware. Clonezilla looked

too complicated and Drive Image XML did not clone drives directly, nor did it copy the Master Boot Record. EaseUs Todo simply hung part way through the clone process and I gave up and uninstalled it.

Acronis True Image worked a treat and took about 25 minutes to clone a 250 Gb system drive using a bootable CD that I had to create first. The only draw back was that it copied the two partitions on the drive as they were and did not give me an option to just copy the system partition. That was not a problem though.

I then tried to use the bootable CD in a Windows 2003 server to copy that system disc. The CD would not boot so it looked like it was tailored in some way to the desktop system. That left me wondering how to clone the 2003 server disc.

The priority on Tuesday 23rd June was to collect a water sample from our cat. The vet had asked us for one weeks ago when we last renewed her kidney tablets and she needed some more, which we were not going to get without a water sample analysis. It took until about 11 a.m. for the cat to swallow her pride and part with the necessary in the litter tray containing non-adsorbent litter, having started the confinement almost 24 hours previously. Anybody would have thought she had been born in Yorkshire.

Meanwhile, I had a long chat with my sister, Edith, in NZ on Skype.

We rushed the cat's sample to the vet in Bury, since the last time we undertook the exercise the sample wasn't fresh enough. I didn't know pee had a shelf-life. The vet said someone would telephone with the results in the afternoon.

I called at PC World for some memory to repair Jenny's laptop, the batch from Crucial being the wrong voltage and having been returned. PC World was about as much use as a chocolate teapot.

We called for some diesel at Tesco, where I received 2p off each litre of diesel thanks to the Fuel Save scheme. Every little helps.

After lunch, I ordered memory specifically advertised for the model of Jenny's laptop from Offtek and I awaited delivery.

While pondering the problem of how to clone the server disc and fishing around on the server checking the disc configuration, I discovered an Acronis device in the list of hardware. Strange, I thought. Looking that up on the Internet led me to suspect a version of Acronis software was installed on the server. Sure enough, there it was, a server version which would have cost me an arm and a couple of legs to purchase.

I approached the software cautiously, firstly creating an Acronis bootable recovery media CD. That worked on the second attempt, the first failing due to bad media or, in laymen's terms, a duff, blank CD.

I then jumped in with both feet and configured the cloning process to copy the operating system to the spare 250 Gb disc I had inserted the previous day. Not only did that work a treat but the system booted from the cloned disc, with the original disc disconnected and everything seemed to work alright.

I put the side case back on my desktop and resolved to fix the new disc properly in the server and put its side cases back on later or early the following day because I needed to power it off again to do so.

That would leave two immediate outstanding problems, one being the version of BIOS in my desktop PC and the other being Matthew's old PC with a suspected faulty power supply, assuming all went well with the new memory in Jenny's laptop when it arrived.

The forecast being pretty fair for the following day, I planned to cut the grass.

And so I did. Wednesday 24th June saw the grass cut on the back and side before lunch and the front after lunch, despite a painful knee from the hard, tiled, conservatory floor the day before. That was as much as I could manage and I was a little annoyed that the injury prevented me from my usual day's labour of strimming the edges and tidying up the borders.

The memory I had ordered from Offtek arrived while I was cutting the grass and I fitted it in Jenny's laptop during the lunch break. That seemed to work alright.

I telephoned the vet since no-one had bothered to contact us and the cat's sample analysis was fine.

We walked down to Bury along the Kirklees Trail on Thursday 25th June, the objective being to pick up the cat's tablets we had ordered from the vet. Since the path came out at Tesco we thought we'd nip in to Costa Coffee for lunch, taking advantage of their new gluten-free offering. That proved to be a waste of time as the said item had been discontinued. We walked out in disgust and made our way to the vet.

Having collected the 90 tablets for just over £90, we made our way to the bus stop and caught the 481 back to Greenmount, coming back home for lunch.

I spent most of the afternoon trying to recover my desktop computer from a self-inflicted problem. I had downloaded a copy of free FTP software called Filezilla, which I already had installed on the server, so I had no reason to suspect the software was malicious. The version I downloaded and installed had all sorts of malware built into it and the only way to recover was to revert to the back up copy of the system disc and then clone that back to the original drive.

We went grocery shopping as usual on Friday 26th June, calling at Asda on the way out for six bottles of Yellow Tail Chardonnay and six bottles of Yellow Tail Shiraz, both priced at £10 for two, an offer not to be missed.

I continued me exploits in the IT field when I returned.

It was Saturday 27th June, after calling in at Matthew and Carrie's house, buying four bags of organic topsoil from Summerseat garden centre and touring the charity shops in Ramsbottom before I completed the cloning exercise and managed to get the desk top PC back into working order. It was fortunate I had created a cloned copy. It was also fortunate that all my data was cloned onto Jenny's laptop and I was able to synchronise that as well.

Our main reasons for visiting Matthew, who had aborted his plan to tour the Netherlands on his motorcycle with his friends due to Carrie's predicament, and Carrie were to see how Carrie was faring after her pot had been removed the previous day and to drop in their anniversary card, Sunday being their first wedding anniversary.

While dealing with the desk top, I finally managed to fix the hard drive in the server and replace its covers.

That was two down, two to go, in the sense that Matthew's old PC was still in bits in the lounge, needing, I suspected, a new power supply and Jenny's laptop that still kept crashing.

I had established that the laptop worked perfectly well in Safe Mode so it was unlikely to be a hardware problem. I contemplated reinstalling Windows and commenced the back up process and downloading all the drivers I might need.

I had a modicum of success later in the day as I managed to load up Matthew's old PC and ascertained that the faulty drive from my desktop did not work in Matthew's old PC either.

Even better, I eventually managed to get Jenny's laptop to reinstall Windows 7 from the HP restore partition on the hard drive. That wasn't easy but being the clever chap I am, I found out how to do it, with a bit of trial and not so much error.

I spent most of Sunday 28th June loading Windows updates and the software I needed on Jenny's laptop.

I also removed the faulty hard drive from Matthew's old PC and replaced it with a working spare, onto which I cloned a copy of the system disc. That was another job done. I also managed to get the PC working with my TV tuner just in case Jenny's laptop went toes up.

On Monday 29th June, we went for a walk round Jumbles reservoir. I needed a break and some fresh air. It was ages since we had been to Jumbles and we stopped off at the café for a cup of tea and a snack, which we enjoyed outside, overlooking the reservoir.

On returning, it was back to the PC problems.

The restore process on Jenny's laptop went alright and I managed to install all the Windows 7 patches and almost all the software I needed. The only snag was that it didn't solve the problem of the laptop crashing.

On Tuesday 30th June, I ran a series of diagnostics on Jenny's laptop. Meanwhile I spent the day in the garden, after submitting a grocery order to Abel and Cole for delivery on the coming Friday.

I washed out the bottle/can recycling bin that had been emptied that morning, cut and strimmed the back lawn, cropped the oak tree's lower branches and cut the grass on the side garden which the council man has not touched on his last two visits, thank goodness.

As we move out of June and into July, we do so in one of those very rare occurrences, a scorching heat wave, which looked set to last at least a few days.