

Greenmount March 2017

Wednesday March 1<sup>st</sup>: I started work on manufacturing the piece of wood to tidy up the edging of the landing floor, something that had been on my list for years, if not decades.

That started well, although I could have done with some modern-day woodworking machine tools, like a router (as in the American pronunciation), a bench on which to fix it and a workshop in which to put the bench. Instead, I struggled on with my trusty mallet, wood chisels and my portable Black and Decker Workmate bench that was nowhere near as robust as its predecessor.

I made good progress and, by the end of the day, I had something that not only fitted reasonably well but which also looked quite good. It needed some fine adjustments and in the fading light I left those for the following day.

Thursday March 2<sup>nd</sup>: I intended finishing the piece of wood to hide the edge of the landing floor where it met the staircase wall on the dining-room side.

Instead, Jenny suggested going round to see Doreen, who lives across the back of our house, about some car-booty she had for us. In the brief dry spell, we loaded the car to about one third of its capacity with boxes and bags of goodies and brought them home.

Jenny unpacked them in the kitchen and I spent the rest of the day looking up prices for various items, collected from various parts of the world.

Friday March 3<sup>rd</sup>: The day started with a short journey to the Old School to drop off some items for the next jumble sale and pick up rubbish for the tip. With the car well stuffed with boxes and bags, we headed off to Bury.

It took us about half an hour to sort and dump the items in their respective containers for recycling before making our way to our first grocery halt at Asda, Pilsworth, where Yellowtail Shiraz and Chardonnay were on offer at £6 a bottle, just about the best price we could find anywhere.

From there it was a comfortable journey to Unicorn in Chorlton, leaving me wondering where everyone was, Asda being so quiet, the roads relatively uncongested and acquiring a parking space at Unicorn without having to queue.

There were quite a few idiots on the road (so what's new), some overtaking me on the left on the motorway despite my travelling at the restricted speed limit monitored with average speed cameras and the right-hand lane being free. There was also some dawdling along the A56 to Waitrose in Broadheath.

The journey home was a little more interesting with heavy congestion and the added entertainment of an emergency vehicle looming up from the rear with sirens on and blue lights flashing. Moving into the middle lane to allow it to pass and then darting into the fast lane behind it somewhat improved matters until we approached our exit, where negotiating a route across three lanes to the nearside lane and the slip-road proved to be the challenge of the day.

Remarkably, we made it home unscathed in about 50 minutes from Waitrose, which wasn't bad under the circumstances, having encountered the school run in Bury.

My evening was spent planning the TV recordings for the coming week.

Saturday March 4<sup>th</sup>: A 7 a.m. start saw us at the Old School before 9 a.m. for the monthly Drop-in at 10 a.m. and we set about the task of displaying some electrical items we had already priced and tested for sale. I then commenced work on testing and pricing new items that had found their way into the general jumble, stored in the old staff room, as opposed to the electrical jumble, stored in the cellar.

Jenny and I sold about £15 worth of items before packing up slightly early so that Jenny could be at the opticians for her eye test in Ramsbottom at 12:20 p.m.

I dropped Jenny off at the opticians while I went to park the car in the only free spot in the station car park, vacated as I arrived. I walked up to the opticians and, some twenty minutes later and some £600 poorer, Jenny had ordered her new spectacles.

We decided to have lunch at Owens before touring the charity shops. Jenny quite enjoyed her Cesar Salad. I wish I could say the same for my pulled-pork ciabatta. It was most disappointing, but, then, maybe it was my own fault, since I was used to eating gluten-free food and I found the large piece of bread hard-going. The filling being as much stuffing as pork didn't help. A larger side salad and no chips would have been good and whatever a sandwich should be served with a jug of gravy is beyond my understanding. On balance, it was not a wise choice. Personally, I think the restaurant would do well to concentrate on providing more conventional sandwiches for lunch.

The charity shops yielded two more DVDs, "Singin' in the Rain" and "Play Misty for Me". Jenny found a book or two.

We came home and I was not feeling well. Whether it was due to two late nights and two early mornings in a row or the larger-than-usual, gluten-filled lunch I was not sure and I ended up falling asleep for about an hour. That did not improve matters much. I helped Jenny pack the car for the following day's table-top sale and subsequently retired a little earlier than had become the custom to prepare for the even earlier start the following day.

Sunday March 5<sup>th</sup>: Having retired at 10:30 the previous evening and dropped off fairly quickly, I awoke to a call of nature at 12:30 a.m. I woke again for no obvious reason at 3:30 a.m. and again at 4:30 a.m. before the alarm forced me out of bed at 5:30. A quick wash in cold water, as had become my custom of late, raised my state of consciousness, so much so that I was able to don my underwear before my trousers.

Breakfast was ready by the time Jenny joined me and we left about 6:45 a.m. for the Civic hall in Ramsbottom. It was a very nice morning and we arrived early, before the Hall was unlocked and parked near the door, waiting to take in our goods.

We had been allocated a six-foot-long table close to the door and we had packed enough items for double the available space. It was as crowded as any UK penal institution of the present time, not that I had personal experience of such and we made the best of it. The official trading time was 8 a.m. to noon, although we packed up early and we were home

for 12:05, having made about £25 profit on the morning, less than half the minimum wage for four hours for two people.

I was tired, cramped and not overjoyed at the poor turnover and having to carry the goods back to the car in the pouring rain was just about the last straw. Still, as Jenny pointed out, we had, at least, reduced our storage requirement by a small amount and at least we had not made a loss.

We decided to have some lunch and leave the unpacking for the following day.

I updated the village web site for the second day in a row, adding some events for the local orchard at Hollymount, now run by a team of volunteers from Incredible Edible in Ramsbottom.

Monday March 6<sup>th</sup>: A very late start had us up and running just before noon. Jenny spent the afternoon sorting her car booty on the drive while I put the finishing touches to the piece of wood I was fashioning for the stairs and gave it its first coat of varnish on three sides, leaving it in the garage overnight to dry.

In the evening, I went to a village meeting in the Church at 8 p.m. and the unusually long agenda had a large audience captivated for about 1½ hours. The two long items covered Cyber Crime and the sale by the council of two plots of grassland used for recreational purposes on Greenheys Crescent.

In the latter case, it seemed that the council, being strapped for cash, did not want the recurring cost of maintenance of the land and there was a mood amongst the local residents indicating that we might take on that responsibility to prevent the sale or possibly even consider purchasing the land as a community asset.

The real solution to the problem was, of course, to allow the council to increase their income and if the government kept reducing their annual allowance instead of increasing it, the only way to do that would be to increase the rates people paid. My personal view was that they should be able to impose an income-related tax instead of the rate tax. That, coupled with a cap on salaries paid to staff of, say £50,000, would go a long way to solving their problem and give the public good quality services again.

Tuesday March 7<sup>th</sup>: In contrast to the previous day, I was up at 8 a.m. and at the Incredible Edible plot in one of those rare, nice, dry mornings for about 10 a.m. Donna, who manages the plot and Dave Archer were already there and Dave was busy weeding and turning over the top bed while Donna was pruning the bushes and generally tidying up the paths. I was put to work weeding and digging over the wild flower bed ready for this year's planting. Tracey joined us a little later and took over where I left off for a rest. I helped Tracey finish off the bottom part of the bed, helped her pack her car with the bags of rubbish, her tools and one of the displays the children at the local school had made from bottle tops which had lost its fixing post and needed a good jet-wash.

I agreed to measure the width of the wild flower bed so we could divide it in two, the back half for permanent shrubs and the front half for wild flowers and also the shed windows so Tracey could obtain some Perspex to replace the broken glass windows. The first challenge was to free up the combination lock so we could gain access to the shed.

I also suggested we erect a poly wind-break at the top of the beds to protect the beans to be planted in the top bed from the wind since the gap between the church and the houses acted as a wind tunnel. I needed to discuss that with our construction man, Frank.

I came home for lunch about 12:30.

I gave the piece of wood for the landing another coat of varnish.

Wednesday March 8<sup>th</sup>: I spent most of the day on the computer, having to constantly apply updates to the village web site due to the large amount of activity and also updating the picture gallery on my web site, these latter changes still being under development.

I had been suffering with a stomach bug and did not really feel like doing much else.

Thursday March 9<sup>th</sup>: Rachel's car was booked in for a service so we followed her down to the garage and gave her a lift to work.

We took some rubbish to the tip in Bury and then I went in search of some brass wood screws to fix the piece of wood on the landing. That was a waste of time. I tried Wickes and not even Jewsons had any.

I also needed a new Edison Screw socket to repair a standard lamp for the Old School. The electrical suppliers on the trading estate in Bury could not help and suggested I should try the lighting shop on the way to Fairfield Hospital. I decided to leave that for another day.

Jenny needed a top-up shop and we paid a visit to Tesco before returning home for lunch.

I had purchased new batteries from Tesco for my and Jenny's fobs that operated the garage door. Unfortunately, I had purchased the wrong ones and we nipped into Ramsbottom to change them at Tesco there. We took the opportunity to tour the charity shops and I found two LPs, one of Bessie Smith and one of the Big Ben Banjo Band. Jenny found a cookery book. I also called in at the hardware shop for two brass screws.

We were home just in time for me to join Joani for our trip to Skipton Building Society in Oldham where Joani was giving a Dementia Friends awareness and training session. I was providing the technical help. I was home for about 7:30 p.m.

Friday March 10<sup>th</sup>: The first job was to put the new batteries in the garage door fobs. Mine worked fine but Jenny's would not operate the garage door. It was the second remote fob to fail, leaving mine as the only one still working. I managed to track down the company that made them 12 years ago and E-mailed them. A reply suggested they may be able to help if I sent pictures of the circuit board.

I fitted the piece of wood on the landing using the screws I had purchased the previous day. Unfortunately, the screws were barely long enough and I resolved to try to obtain some longer ones.

As I was about to start this small task, Donald from the Jehovah's Witnesses arrived and we chatted for a short while. Had we not been so busy, I would have invited him in for a chat. He's a nice chap, originally from Jamaica and he used to play the clarinet, my favourite Jazz instrument, so we had a fair bit to discuss other than religion.

We went to the D-CaFF Dementia Café as usual and I spent the remaining time scheduling the TV programmes for recording for the following week.

Saturday March 11<sup>th</sup>: The weekly, grocery-shopping trip to Unicorn and Waitrose went well, apart from congestion on the M60 anticlockwise approaching the Trafford Centre. The fact that the bill at both was somewhat less than usual made it even better. We had stocked up on most items the previous week, knowing that yesterday was D-CaFF day and in case we didn't make it south of the canal.

I caught up with some IT work and then went round to the IE plot to measure up for some screening to prevent weeds coming through and for some Perspex to replace the windows in the shed that had been broken. I met Tracey while I was at the plot and we had a quick chat. I subsequently sent her the measurements for the Perspex since she said she ought to be able to acquire some.

I freed up the combination lock on the shed door using WD40 and a little brute force and had a look inside. Everything seemed to be in order.

Returning, I continued with the work on the computer, updating my web site, dealing with BT bills and so on.

Sunday March 12<sup>th</sup>: After a considerable gap, it was back to decorating. The first task was to tackle the cracks in the ceiling before the plasterer came to skim it and I decided to start with the worst one, a rather large crack running the full width of the dining room.

My standard technique that had proved successful was to remove the plaster from the plaster-board either side of the crack and wide enough to stick on some webbing on the plasterboard such that the crack was central on the webbing. While the webbing is self-adhesive, I found that applying a generous coating of Evostic wood glue to the plasterboard first and brushing it well into the crack before applying the webbing and then brushing the excess glue, with more if necessary, over the top of the webbing before re-plastering with Polyfilla did the trick. It was usually necessary to sand the finished filling once it had hardened to give a smooth finish before painting. In this case, I intended to skip the sanding since the whole ceiling was being skimmed anyway.

The reason I decided to tackle the cracks in this way before the plasterer came was that I wanted to make sure that the crack did not reappear.

In this particular case, the first problem I encountered was that the plasterboard moved up and down. This did not bode well for a crack-free joint. I applied screws to augment the cladding nails the builder (I use the term loosely for reasons that will soon become clear) had inserted. Working across from the outside wall towards the kitchen wall, I was on the fifth screw when it went straight in and missed the joist.

Past experience had taught me and it should really be self-evident, that plasterboard joints should be made on joists, with the join in the centre of the joist. The idiot who put

up the dining-room ceiling did not quite get it right. I was able to rescue the situation by inserting the screw at an angle.

Continuing to remove the plaster, working further along, I discovered the imbecile had even fewer brain cells than for which I had given him credit. The edges of the two adjoining pieces of plasterboard were about 1 cm apart and the gap had been filled with plaster. In fact, I discovered two long gaps separated, for some inexplicable reason by a short section where the board edges actually met, or as good as.

I finished off the plaster removal, tidied up and, the time being around 4 p.m., decided to tackle the remaining floppy edges and the gaps the following day, assuming the house was still standing.

Monday March 13<sup>th</sup>: It was another day of ceiling work and I started, as planned, by firmly fixing the remaining floppy edges of the plasterboard in the crack in the dining-room ceiling. That was followed by cutting two thin strips of plaster-board to fit the gaps and gluing them in place using Evostick wood glue.

I coated the whole strip of bare plaster-board with the same sticky substance and then applied the self-adhesive webbing from the reel I kept in store, along with the plaster-board and glue, just in case I needed it, as one does. That was not as easy as it sounds since the webbing was not quite as adhesive as it should have been and I had to enlist Jenny's help to hold the reel while I applied the webbing and encouraged it to stick.

My final work for the day was to coat the whole length of webbing with yet more glue to make sure it was going to stay where I put it and to tidy up.

At 5:45 p.m. we were round the other side of the Crescent at Fellside Close for a photo-shoot of massed objectors to the Council sale of green, recreational areas on the estate, this one and the one at the bottom of the Crescent.

I managed to find time to update my web site with [pictures of the decorating progress](#) thus far and also the [village web site](#) with the latest information.

Tuesday March 14<sup>th</sup>: The Incredible Edible working party was cancelled due to the weather. It did clear up in the late morning and Mike and Lorna arrived. Lorna wanted a chat with Jenny and Mike was keen to restore the sign on the land across the road that designated it as an "ornamental" area just in case the Council or anyone else had any designs on it.

We fixed it to a tree with three screws, about six feet or, for those unable to cope with the English system of measurement and only able to count in tens, about two metres above ground level to prevent mischievous children from removing it.

That done, we turned our attention to a fence panel that had blown down in the corner of the garden of the house behind the tree. It wasn't surprising it had blown down because the posts holding it in place seemed to be too far apart and sloping away from each other. I fetched a piece of wood from the garage to use as a wedge and with that, together with a piece of wood that was lying around and had, seemingly, been used before, we managed to fix it firmly in place, at least, as a temporary measure.

Mike and Lorna left for lunch and after mine, I spent the rest of the day tending and reorganising the picture gallery on my web site.

Wednesday March 15<sup>th</sup>: It was a nice day and Jenny went off to meet Gwen for a day out in Bury. I decided to tend the garden and gave the grass on the back its first cut of the year and then I tidied up the borders, including the cat's latrine.

I broke off for lunch on the bench outside, finished off the back garden and then dealt with the side.

The first task was to pick up three lots of dog poo. The second was to go round with the wheelbarrow picking up all the twigs that had broken off the trees. That filled the wheelbarrow.

Cutting the grass was hard going, being the first cut of the season and I had to make a stop to collect a fourth load of dog dung.

After tidying up, clearing the excess grass and deposits from the lawn mower and putting everything away it was 5:45 p.m. That's what I called a decent day's work and it would all need doing again in a week or two. And I still had to cut the grass on the front.

Thursday March 16<sup>th</sup>: We had to go into Ramsbottom for Jenny's appointment at the opticians at 10:00 a.m. for her field test, to collect her new glasses and for a hearing test.

Jenny's hearing test indicated no issues so I concluded that the problems I had encountered were due to her hearing being selective!

Jenny missed a couple of spots on the field test. Since this was on a computer and she is not a technology person, my guess was that there wasn't really an issue.

While Jenny was being fitted for her glasses, I nipped into the hardware shop for some longer brass screws for my piece of wood on the landing. The chap only had No 8 screws that were 40 mm long so I settled for two of those at 15 p each.

I also paid a visit to the health shop after the hardware shop because it was not open beforehand. I wanted some Vogel tincture for catarrh and mucous coughs but it was out of stock and if I purchased it there I would have to wait until the following week. Jenny could have bought some the previous day in the health shop in the market in Bury when she obtained my free Vogel Saw Palmetto but I didn't want to give the shop my custom after the chap there was not particularly pleasant when we last spent quite a lot of money on health items.

My dry cough had returned the previous evening and persisted into the early hours and then again this morning and I think it was due to my working outside in the warm sunshine the previous day and not drinking enough water.

After the opticians, we went to Tesco for some Highland Spring water because we had run out. The shop did not stock any 6 packs and individual bottles were 60p each, which was expensive.

After purchasing a large bottle of organic milk, we headed for Morrisons. The shop did not sell any Highland Spring six packs either but individual bottles were only 50p so we bought two to tide us over until our grocery shop the following day.

We were home for 10:50 a.m., expecting Simon and Vicky about 11 a.m.

While I was waiting for them to arrive, I updated this diary of exciting events and tended Rachel's XP laptop that was downloading and installing updates after I had installed the Microsoft Update Internet Explorer 8 patch and the Embedded XP registry patch the previous evening and left it searching for updates overnight.

Simon and Vicky arrived about 11:30 and it transpired that they had stayed overnight at the Grants Arms in Ramsbottom.

We chatted and then went to Summerseat Garden centre for lunch about 1 p.m., Rachel joining us about 1:45 p.m.

We came home about 3:30 p.m. and Simon and Vicky went back to the Grants Arms to sort out an excess charge for some missing towels and a bath mat that had never been provided in the first place. I had asked them what they thought of the Grants Arms when they arrived and they said it was not very nice, the room having no towels and no soap and the bed was covered in hairs inside. The people in the neighbouring room had been noisy until the wee small hours and the walls were too thin to be effective in reducing the rowdiness. How standards had fallen with regard to health and hygiene and the "hotel" clearly having to resort to intimidating guests in order to generate income.

Their return to the hotel so soon to resolve the overcharge seemed to take the young receptionist by surprise and when Simon explained they had taken pictures of the room when they arrived, a quick telephone call soon resolved the matter. Had they not still been in the vicinity and had they not taken pictures of the room, the outcome might have been quite different.

From this experience, I would judge the Grants Arms was not a place to frequent.

We had another cup of tea/coffee, chatted and Simon and Vicky left about 6 p.m. for home.

I spent most of the evening trying to sort out why Microsoft Update in Windows XP was hogging the CPU on Rachel's laptop and why AVG Secure Search update failed every time the system reloaded.

I ended up replacing the whole of AVG with a copy of my Norton Security. That sorted that problem out.

As for Microsoft Update, having tracked the issue to a thread in an svchost process, I eventually discovered I had the same problem on the old Toshiba laptop I had resurrected and I left both systems running overnight to update windows and the Toshiba to also update AVG.

Friday March 17<sup>th</sup>: Both laptop machines were back to normal, the Toshiba having downloaded and applied all the updates and rebooted. That I packed away.

Rachel's Dell laptop had downloaded the updates and I left it to install them while I had breakfast. Afterwards, I shut it down and left it for Rachel to play with when she needed it.

Jenny went round to the hairdressing salon (Cream) for a hair cut before we sped off in a southerly direction to Unicorn and Waitrose, calling in Bury for a couple of items.

We collected the cat's biscuits from the vet's practice in Bury then called at the Lighthouse on Rochdale Old Road. That is the name of the shop, not, in this instance, a generic term for a warning beacon to shipping. Bury isn't that close to the coast. I went to obtain an Edison Screw fitting for a standard lamp I was repairing.

From there, we sped off to our main grocery shopping at Unicorn and then on to Waitrose for lunch and the rest of our groceries.

On the outward journey, I succeeded in annoying a driver of a white jeep-type vehicle by pulling out in front of it in the fast lane of the motorway with very little room to spare. It was the vehicle's driver's fault really. I was travelling at the speed limit or just slightly above it and he or she was creeping up on the outside at a marginally faster speed so the vehicle must have been travelling above the speed limit. Secondly, I did indicate I was pulling out for some distance before I did so, giving the vehicle's driver the opportunity to hold back, which he or she failed to do. I did eventually give him or her the opportunity to pass me and a short distance further on, the vehicle was stuck in traffic as I glided past on its right so the driver achieved absolutely nothing for all their aggression and speed.

The return journey was painfully slow due to nothing more than the volume of traffic and the inability of drivers to cope with traffic merging onto and leaving the motorway by leaving sufficient gaps.

I did annoy another driver in Tottington by failing to signal I was making a right turn to come down towards Greenmount and I must admit that was entirely my fault, due to a lack of concentration. We all make mistakes. The key is to make allowances for them by leaving enough room and anticipating what other drivers are going to do. Resorting to using the horn achieves nothing. Using the brain can avoid accidents.

Saturday March 18<sup>th</sup>: We spent most of the day round at the Old School working on the electrical jumble with only three weeks to go to the next sale.

We were home for about 4 p.m. and I continued this work at home, repairing the standard lamp, fitting the new Edison Screw socket I purchased the previous day.

That success was followed by the inevitable IT work. I caught up with Jazz Record Requests too, this week's transmission being from Gateshead as part of the Free Thinking festival and a complete load of rubbish. Alyn Shipton, the presenter, normally managed to squeeze in at least two or three proper jazz (as in New Orleans style) tunes but not this week. I supposed I should write in with requests more often myself but I liked to hear new (to me) and different pieces suggested by others and, in fairness, not all the jazz I liked was pre-1930.

While checking some IT work, I stumbled across what seemed to be a couple of shockers concerning the development of Mozilla Firefox.

Only recently I had reported that the Mozilla Firefox PDF viewer plug-in did not work correctly when displaying hyperlinks in some PDF documents that presented no such obstacle to Internet Explorer. My solution was to use the Adobe PDF plug-in. Now, I discovered, the latest release of Firefox no longer supported the Adobe PDF plug-in. Mozilla's solution – use the built-in Firefox PDF viewer. Nice one, Mozilla.

Worse was to come. Mozilla planned, in the next Firefox release, to stop support for Java applets. I refer you to the phrase or saying referencing a gun and a foot.

I was rapidly forming the opinion that this seemed like a good time to dump Mozilla Firefox and to search for a decent alternative. As much as I hated to contemplate it, Internet Explorer was starting to look quite attractive again.

I could understand the reasons for these developments but there was no advantage in upholding ones ideals unless and until one had an alternative strategy for at least reliably maintaining the current level of functionality.

Sunday March 19<sup>th</sup>: The first task of the day was to remove the large, double-radiator in the dining room so Jenny could scrape off the rest of the wallpaper behind it. That took quite a while to drain the bucket and a half of murky water and Jenny gave me a lift to remove it, during which process I managed to drop it on her foot.

With the radiator perched against the opposite wall, Jenny set about dealing with the wallpaper while I tackled another, shorter crack in the dining room ceiling. The lack of light made that difficult and I gave up, turning my attention to a bulge of filler I had put in the ceiling just along the join, where an old light fitting used to be. Removing the Polyfilla revealed a decent sized hole and three wires, two running to a strip connector and one continuous twin and earth running under the joist. I confirmed these were no longer in use, cut them (with the power off, just to be sure) and then pushed them back into the ceiling void. I also cut the loose ends of these wires behind the switch at the bottom of the stairs.

That was all we really achieved and I resolved to buy a bulb for the standard lamp I had repaired so I could use that to provide the light I needed to deal with the ceiling.

I spent some time continuing the work on my web site picture gallery.

I also had a chat with my nephew, John, recovering from recent operation at home. I was pleased to learn he was doing well and was up and about.

Monday March 20<sup>th</sup>: We had a dental appointment at noon so I did not start any dining room reconstruction work. Instead, I continued working on my web site picture gallery.

The dental appointment went well and, needing no treatment, the dentist cleaned my teeth and sent me on my way for another six months. Jenny also had her teeth cleaned and made her next appointment three months hence.

After lunch at home, the rain had finally stopped and we headed off to the tip with rubbish from the Old School and then to Asda. Our main aim was to purchase some Armagnac and that light bulb I needed. Jenny found some Prosecco on offer and bought two bottles as well as a few other items.

I was back dealing with my web site photo gallery and updated the server. I then started working back on the earlier photographs I had not catalogued and preparing those for the web site.

We rushed off to the Friends of Huntfold meeting in the church where Chris Rogan updated the gathering on progress with our opposition to the sale of green land on the estate by the council. The meeting lasted an hour and it seemed as though positive progress was being made.

Tuesday March 21<sup>st</sup>: It was my intention to resume work on the dining room ceiling. Jenny needed some help with the application of some organic, compost-making fluid she had purchased at the garden centre the previous week so we were working outside in one of those rare sunny periods during the morning, taking time to prepare the raised beds for planting.

Before lunch, I managed to squeeze in an update to the village web site.

After lunch, I started on the ceiling and, after discovering another gap between the plasterboard pieces and about fifteen minutes' work, I fell off the step-stool I was using. I went flying, landing full-length on the carpet at the bottom of the stairs and I would have been fine had my right leg and right side not encountered the large, wooden post supporting the handrail at the bottom of the stairs on the way down. I hasten to assure you that the wooden post was undamaged.

I gathered my thoughts and composure for a few minutes and examined my leg. I was relieved to find that I had no damaged bones, although I had some nasty grazes on my shin and some nasty bruises forming down my shin and round my knee. Fortunately my clothing cushioned the blow to my side.

The rapid application of fresh Aloe Vera gel from one of our plants in the conservatory soon soothed my leg and I spent the rest of the day resting it, with further applications of Aloe Vera gel.

That allowed me to reorganise, catalogue and publish on my web site further pictures from earlier times.

Wednesday March 22<sup>nd</sup>: I resumed work on the ceiling crack, this time using the stepladders which I fetched from the garage. Removing the plaster from the plasterboard round the crack I soon discovered that the plasterboard towards the dining room was almost a centimetre lower than the board towards the bottom of the staircase as I progressed along the crack from the outside wall to the staircase. It then curved back up again to the same level as the adjoining plasterboard.

To understand the reason for this, you need to know that the upper floor joists at the back of the house run side to side and those at the front run front to back. Where these join, they are connected together using joist hangers. For some strange reason, the joist

hanger on one of the beams is about a centimetre below the beam itself and not flush with it.

Obviously the moron who laid the upper floor joists, which, incidentally are not level, but slope downwards from the north side of the house to the opposite, outside wall, had not an ounce of skill or experience, probably had no qualifications and I would be surprised if he could even read or write. He would have been more at home with his mates, swinging through the trees. On second thoughts, I wouldn't want to offend the apes.

Dealing with the crack, the bow in the plasterboard, a sizeable gap between the boards and a hole in the ceiling where an old light fitting used to be, I ended up inserting an L-shaped piece of plasterboard, held in place by two screws and loads of glue. I left that to set overnight, tidied up and decided that was enough for today at about 3:30 p.m.

Thursday March 23<sup>rd</sup>: Jenny went off to meet Rachel for a day out in Manchester. I went to a Dementia Awareness and a Dementia Friends Presentation with Joani at [The Tempest Arms](#), Elslack, near Skipton, given to employees of The Skipton Building Society.

The pub was very nice. Joani and I lunched there before the presentation and I requested my sandwich on gluten-free bread, which was available on request. When my sandwich arrived, I double checked it was gluten-free and the waitress went back to check. It was not, but that was soon rectified. Apparently, the request had not been passed from the till where it was ordered to the kitchen, something the management needed to address before someone with gluten-intolerance suffered a bad or possibly fatal reaction. This establishment was not the first to make this mistake and I doubt it will be the last and the impact of gluten intolerance needed to be brought more into the forefront in catering establishments. Meanwhile, for the benefit of all those celiacs out there, it is always best to keep checking the meal you are served is gluten-free.

I was home for just after 4 p.m. after returning using the more direct route of the A56 using our sense of direction rather than the back lanes and single-track roads with steep gradients and sharp bends on which we went, courtesy of the satellite navigation system.

Friday March 24<sup>th</sup>: We set off early on our forage for groceries and we seemed to miss most of the traffic in both directions. It occurred to me that we should do this regularly.

Our reason for the early start was that we needed to be back in good time for Jenny to be ready for her evening out. Carrie was taking Jenny and Marie to a performance of Les Miserables at Bury Grammar School by way of a mother's-day present and, apart from the uncomfortable seating, they thoroughly enjoyed it.

Meanwhile, Matthew and I walked across to the Bull's Head Toby Carvery for tea and a few beers, catching up on work and plans for the future and generally putting the world to rights.

We came home for a glass of water and an organic, single-Scottish-malt whisky before Carrie arrived to drop off Jenny and collect Matthew.

We had thoroughly enjoyed our evening as well and we had comfortable seats!

Saturday March 25<sup>th</sup>: I spent most of the day at the Old School dealing with more electrical jumble and Jenny joined me for lunch and the afternoon.

One of my first tasks was to check the water heater in the ladies' toilet and, finding no leakage, I switched it back on and it seemed to work. I left it heating the water for the washbasins, assuming that the previous problem of it tripping the circuit breaker was due to condensation.

We came home just in time for me to listen to Jazz Record Requests at 4 p.m. while updating the village web site.

Sunday March 26<sup>th</sup>: It was a nice day again and I spent most of it on the computer and generally tidying up a few bits and pieces.

We went for tea at the Swan and Cemetery to celebrate Mother's Day, courtesy of Rachel, collecting Rachel from the tram station in Bury on the way down.

The meal was very nice yet again and the waitress told us that half of the cast of Hollyoaks had been sitting at the tables outside in the sunny afternoon. It then dawned on me that they had been at the charity football match at Gigg Lane which was between the cast of Hollyoaks and Tottington High School to raise funds for [Alison Turner's Fight for Fusion](#) operation, scheduled for the end of May in Barcelona. The operation was not available on the NHS. It was a good idea of Aneurin Bevan while it lasted.

Monday March 27<sup>th</sup>: We awoke early to another nice day.

I had telephoned our plasterer the previous evening and he telephoned me back during breakfast to say he was not sure when he could start our plastering. To be more accurate, he wasn't sure if he could start our plastering. He has dislocated his collar bone in a fall some time previously and didn't know. The injury had not repaired itself properly and it was now giving him trouble. This was not the kind of injury plasterers needed. He was waiting for the results of an examination to find out what was to be done about it.

The first task after breakfast was to find another plasterer. I telephoned one we had used before, Shaun. His landline was no longer in use. Matt and Carrie had recommended him in the first place and I contacted Matt. He gave me his mobile number, That was not in use either. Matt said he would find out from a friend if there was an update on his contact numbers.

Our original end of March deadline for decorating was meant to be 2017, not 2018.

We decided to ask Bob and Marie if they had a plasterer they could recommend when we met them for lunch and to go down and see Jenny's friend, June and her husband, Ray, to see if they could recommend anyone.

The second task after breakfast and the usual pot washing routine was to rummage through my electrical spares box in the garage to retrieve a spare and rather dirty, MK, double, 13 amp switched-socket to replace the faulty one in the kitchen.

The third task was to clean the socket outside ready for fitting. The installation had to wait while Jenny's washing cycle had finished.

To accommodate the wet washing, task number four was to tighten the washing lines.

Jenny helped me bring in the step-ladders in preparation for task number five, which was to apply some webbing to the last dining-room ceiling crack I dealt with, what seemed like days ago. Thinking of it, it was days ago.

Soon after completing that tricky and sticky task, Jenny's washer finished and it was time to shut down the server and my desktop in the conservatory, which I had left on overnight by mistake, so I could switch off the power to fit the socket I had cleaned.

The replacement took all of ten minutes and everything was back to normal, in its loosest sense.

That left about half an hour to ready ourselves for meeting our son's in-laws, Bob and Marie for lunch at Owens in Ramsbottom. It was a hard life.

We had a passable meal at Owens. The lamb rump Bob and I had came with gravy but it wasn't minted gravy and lamb needs mint. It came with a suede and carrot mix and mash potato. What it also needed was some greens, of which there was a distinct lack.

Jenny's vegetable stroganoff was, in a word, rubbish. Jenny cooks a far better stroganoff at home.

Personally, I wouldn't give the restaurant more than a one star rating.

We did enjoy Bob and Marie's company and it was nice of them to treat us to lunch.

We finished our visit to Ramsbottom with a tour of the charity shops before returning home about 4 p.m.

My last effort of the day was yet another update of the village web site, prompted by a requested change to the Weight Watchers activity at the Old School.

In the late evening, Rachel, who had come up on the tram the previous day, asked for a lift to the tram station in Bury so she could go home. We took her home to Manchester.

Tuesday march 28<sup>th</sup>: Joani collected me at 9:45 a.m. for another Dementia Awareness presentation at Skipton Building Society in Bury. I left Jenny in bed with a nasty headache, a sore throat and a bad, chesty cough.

While I was out a builder of all trades for whom Bob and Marie had given me the contact details telephoned me to arrange to come and look at the work required. Since I was otherwise engaged, I had to telephone Jenny and get her out of bed to show the chap round.

When I returned, Jenny told me he had been and had suggested not plastering the landing ceiling but putting lining paper on it instead. He also seemed surprised we wanted plaster coving to match the lounge coving. I formed the impression he was not really interested and decided against using him.

Alistair telephoned me in the afternoon in response to an E-mail reply I had sent him earlier in the day. I happened to mention I was looking for a plasterer and he recommended a very good chap. I telephoned him and, since he was out, left a message.

Meanwhile I spent the afternoon preparing the two letters of objection to the sale of green land on the estate for Jenny.

The plasterer telephoned me back in the evening and when I described the work to him, he said it was really too big a job for him, being semi-retired.

So we were back to square one.

Matthew sent me the contact details for another plasterer and I decided to contact him the following day.

Wednesday March 29<sup>th</sup>: After breakfast, I telephoned the new plasterer for whom Matthew had sent me the details. There was no reply.

I thought I'd give a well-known, local company called Awkward Corner the opportunity to quote for the work. I had used them before and I knew they had become somewhat expensive but at least it would allow me to make progress, or so I thought. The telephone number was not in use and when I checked online, the company had been dissolved.

I was rapidly forming the opinion that some-one, somewhere didn't like me much.

Matthew's plasterer did eventually telephone me and we made arrangements for him to come and look at the work at the week end.

I spent the rest of the day preparing requests for copyright to publish information from my past employment on my web site.

I had a short break, dodging the rain, to take the four land sale objection letters to the box outside number 39 from which they would be collected and handed in at the Town Hall.

Thursday March 30<sup>th</sup>: I decided, after much pondering, to have a look at my Flymo Powertrim 500 grass trimmer. It needed a complete new head and I wanted to find out how to remove the old one and fit a new one, assuming I could find a spare.

I performed the dismantling task on the old patio table outside.

The first challenge was to remove the guard and that wasn't easy. It was wedged in place by two plastic clips, diametrically opposite each other and the only way to prise the clips up was to wedge a small piece of wood behind them. I was going to use a matchstick and settled on a toothpick, broken in half, one half forming each of the two wedges. I prised up the clips with a screwdriver and pushed the wooden wedge in place with a second screwdriver, holding the guard in my third hand. It's what I called a Beeblebrox mechanism. Anyway, with a little brute force and a sharp twist, the guard came off.

It was not obvious how the trimmer head came off the motor shaft, so I took the casing apart, starting with the lower section. That was a mistake because the upper section covered two screws that held the lower section in place.

With the casing apart and the motor exposed, I still could not see how the head was fitted to the shaft. Then I spotted that the cover on the end of the shaft was hexagonal. I tapped the red cover with a screwdriver and it was loose. Prising it out revealed a nut inside the hexagonal tube that formed the shaft cover.

Logic dictated that to loosen the nut, all I had to do was to hold the shaft still while rotating the head in an anti-clockwise direction. That was easier said than done and proved impossible.

There was a hole in the end of the shaft and I thought it might be possible to insert an Allen key to hold the shaft still. The hole did not take an Allen key.

By this time I was beginning to marvel at the wonderful design of this particular apparatus, concluding that my only option was to throw it away and buy a new one. It was so encouraging to know that Flymo was playing its part to conserve the environment.

After lunch I searched for a new grass trimmer, having put the old one, in bits, in a box in the garage. Needless to say, Flymo was not on my list. I settled for a Wolf 500W Twin Line Trimmer direct from Wolf at £110 with a three-year guarantee.

I then started to look for a new lawnmower. I still did not fancy the new Flymo Ultraglide because there were several reports of the motor burning out at a very early stage. My existing Flymo Compact Vision 380 was still working, although somewhat battered and I had a quick look for another the same, this being a discontinued model. Not only was Flymo up there with the leaders in the field of “if it stops working, throw it away because we’ve made it impossible to repair” but they didn’t know when they had a winner.

I found quite a few for sale on E-bay, all buyer collect and all miles away. Even one that was not working well, if it had a sound body, would suffice because I had enough spares to fix it. I wished the same could be said of me.

I left that and finally started plastering up the dining room ceiling cracks I had been repairing. I also touched up the small wall at the top of the stairs to smooth off the plaster so I could paint it and put back the rail.

That led me to the end of my day.

Friday March 31<sup>st</sup>: We set off fairly early on our shopping trip to Unicorn and Waitrose and reaped the benefit. I managed to maintain a steady 50 m.p.h. on the M60, this being the current speed limit while the motorway was being upgraded, outbound and made good time on the return journey, although Bury was quite busy in the mid-afternoon as there were a large number of young people around. I couldn’t help thinking that our educational establishments kept shorter and shorter hours as the years rolled on and it was no wonder that so few people ended up with either no or useless qualifications, doing nothing useful to benefit or improve society.

Back in my comfortable arm-chair, I spent the late afternoon planning the TV and radio recordings for the coming week.

Another month had ended and my deadline for completing the decorating had passed with only the glimpse of a plasterer on the horizon. I was forming the impression that I could spend the rest of my life decorating.