

Greenmount – November 2009

November commenced where October finished, my influenza about to enter its second week of torment. I slept through the transition in one of the chairs in the lounge, having spent the nights of the previous week struggling to breathe in bed, coughing and spluttering for most of the time, keeping Jenny awake as well. I managed a fairly good night's sleep, waking only once, about 5, to take yet another dose of symptom-suppressing tablets.

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November saw no significant change in my illness and, to make matters worse, when I wandered into the conservatory, my desk-top computer was repeatedly trying to reload itself and was in a worse state than me.

I spent most of Sunday working out a strategy for dealing with the problem and, as is usual when things are going as soft, pointy things, skywards, all attempts to rescue the situation failed miserably, ably assisted by my woolly brain, playing host to this damn virus.

My printer is networked from my desk-top PC, so, to bring that back to life I decided to move the USB connection to my broadband router. I installed the new network printer on Jeny's lap top and tested it. So far, so good. I then attempted to load the status monitor, which tells me when it is running out of ink and so on. Not a chance. These things never seem to work on network printers. I resorted to E-mailing support at Canon but I didn't think it would do much good. I was right.

It then occurred to me that I could connect the printer to the Matthew's server, used for my web site and E-mail. That would have worked if Canon provided drivers for Windows 2003 Server. Canon is not doing very well.

I turned my attention to a more pressing need, to be able to watch and record digital, terrestrial, television programmes.

We watch very little live television, relying on recorded entertainment from which all of the advertisements and pointless, preceding, audio-visual clips have been removed and I, being a clever Ken (as opposed to a smart Alec), can turn into DVDs if I wish.

Back to the plot. I decided to purchase a Hauppauge HVR 1900 USB analogue and digital television receiver with a built-in MPEG2 hardware encoder. I can not only use this to record TV programmes but also to convert my old VHS tapes to DVD format. The advantage of the built-in hardware bit is that it requires very little PC processing power and works with Jenny's lap-top.

Or it did until Jenny's lap top turned toes up as well. I think the graphics card is faulty and Fujitsu have quoted the extortionate amount of £205 for a replacement, for which my local, friendly, PC shop will charge me £60 for installation. It also needs a replacement remote control unit at a cost of £12. The question is, do I pay for the repair in the hope that it solves the problem and nothing else goes wrong with the lap top or do I buy a new one with at least twelve month's guarantee at a cost of about £1k?

So, with no lap top PC and no desk top PC we had to resort to making the best of live

television for a while.

Or, at least, we would have done if the separate, Philips, digital tuner we have had for many years would receive the new digital terrestrial channels following the changes in transmission at the beginning of November. We can no longer receive BBC 1 or BBC 2. I sent an E-mail to Philips and Philips kindly replied. It seems the hardware is not compatible with the new digital transmissions and the only course of action is to toss the box into the recycling skip at the local refuse dump. Well done Philips.

While wondering what else could go wrong, the Dyson vacuum cleaner hose of two years developed a hole and I had to purchase a replacement at a cost of £20 and the Sanyo microwave oven is faulty again.

So, to recap, I had a faulty desk top computer (five years old, built by Scan), a faulty Fujitsu lap top (four years old), a faulty digital TV tuner (Philips, at least five years old), a broken Dyson vacuum cleaner hose (two years old) and a broken Sanyo microwave (about five years old). Is there something of a trend here?

By the middle of November, I had fixed the vacuum cleaner.

With a lot of cursing and fiddling, my desk top PC was up and running again, too.

I did originally suspect that the power supply, which I replaced a little over three years ago and is thus just out of warranty, was faulty. My local, friendly PC repair shop checked it for me and said it looked fine.

I went to Scan in Bolton to obtain a quotation for a new PC. After recovering from the shock, I decided to take a closer look at my broken system.

I started with the BIOS (that's the bit you never really see and don't mess with unless you know what you are doing) and discovered that, by loading the "fail-safe defaults", my PC had a go at loading up. I then had to work out what changes I needed to make to the BIOS to get Windows to start. These are the same changes I made a long time ago and never documented. To cut a long story short (that must be a first), several fine-tuning exercises (that's the technical term for fiddling) and several system loads later, it is all working normally. I wish I could fix my 'flu as easily.

I have given up on the microwave and this is going to the tip. We are not replacing it.

I decided to buy a new digital television to solve my channel reception problems. This might sound like overkill (I could simply have purchased a new set-top digital tuner for the old television), but I have been promising to go Digital for a while. My brain has been in bits for years.

I discovered that some new televisions now come with a computer network connection and a feature called DLNA. This allows music and video to be played directly from a PC, which is exactly what I want to do. The slight snag is that the PC needs DLNA server software and this is available from Ahead, of Nero fame, for about £25. Even better, it comes with a 15-

day, free trial so if it doesn't work, I don't pay for it. Better still, Windows Media Player includes a free DLNA server. That suits my Yorkshire upbringing perfectly.

I looked at Panasonic first but the model I saw did not have a composite video input, which I currently use for a PC connection to play movies. This is essential if DLNA does not work. That's my optimism breaking through.

I found a 40 inch Sony LCD model with everything I need (40W5500), although the actual model I have purchased is a variant on this, only available from Sony Centres and John Lewis shops. I paid a little extra for a built-in Freesat tuner, allowing me to receive some of the same digital terrestrial channels via satellite, but in high definition. The cost includes delivery, installation, the one-off cost of Freesat, the Freesat dish and installation and a five-year warranty.

I was going to buy a new DVD recorder at the same time as the television but Sony has discontinued their range of DVD recorders and is bringing out a new range shortly.

The new television was delivered on 21<sup>st</sup> November. The two chaps who brought it installed it and set it up. They even managed to play music from my computer using the DLNA network connection, my having configured Windows Media Player in readiness. Later in the day, I was watching movies on the television from my PC.

Unfortunately, Windows Media Player does not seem to work very well as a DLNA server; it does not find all of the files it should, nor does it present what it does find in the right order and I have, finally, decided it is one of the most shoddy pieces of software I have ever used. Removing it, once installed, is nigh on impossible, so if you've got it, you're stuck with it. You don't have to use it, though. Yet another triumph for Microsoft.

I resorted to plan B (one should always have a Plan B) and loaded the free trial of Nero Media Home. This worked first time and presents everything I require in the correct sequence. It looks well worth the £25 licence fee, which I haven't paid yet.

It's nice to find something going right for a change. Even my 'flu seems to be waning.

It appears every silver lining has a cloud, or, in my case, several consecutive days of thunderstorms.

On Friday 27<sup>th</sup> November, Mike, our very good friend and neighbour, asked me to help him take an old snooker table he had in his garage round to the Old School. Being some six feet in length, it would not fit in his car so he needed the space of my estate and, with the rear seats folded down, it just fitted nicely. We succeeded in delivering the heavy item safely and I thought that was a job well done.

On Saturday morning, I woke with a bit of a back ache, which proceeded to worsen as the day wore on. Despite the discomfort, I managed to decant the Christmas items from the garage loft and change the outside light bulbs that had failed over the past few weeks.

By Sunday morning I was in agony. Jenny and I went into Ramsbottom to buy this year's

Christmas cards, leaving Rachel to decorate the Christmas tree. Jenny drove and I hobbled around with my walking stick, succeeding in doing my best to suppress my overwhelming enthusiasm.

As we leave November, my back is still troublesome and I still have some remnants of 'flu. The tree is up (just), the house is a tip, we haven't sent out any Christmas cards yet and we have done no Christmas shopping. All our well laid plans have evaporated and I've added a gun with one round of ammunition to my Christmas list.

We can, at least, send all of you our very best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous 2010.