

Greenmount – November 2010

We're into the first week of November and, as I start to type this, I don't think it's stopped raining since it began. I'm thinking of changing my name to Noah.

Jenny dodged the showers on Wednesday 3rd, walking down to Summerseat Garden Centre for lunch with a friend, Karen, she met while on the crossing patrol in Ramsbottom. Karen is a Beaver leader in Ramsbottom, so they have lots to chew over. She enjoyed the walk and just managed to walk in the Garden Centre door as the Heavens opened once more. That is, in itself, unusual, as the rain usually starts as we set foot outside and stops as we come in. Fortunately, Karen had already offered Jenny a lift back to Greenmount, Jenny then taking the opportunity to call at the hair dressers. It's a hard life.

This free day left me to pursue the problem of why my desktop computer communicates with the television, allowing me to watch movies on the latter that are stored on my computer's hard disc, when Jenny's new laptop doesn't. I managed to obtain some diagnostics and I have sent these to the company (Ahead) that supplies the software (Nero MediaHome) that is supposed to make all this work. To be fair, the problem I experience is with the Windows 7 laptop and is more probably due to Microsoft's quirks. I don't think that's an unreasonable assumption, given their track record.

In the evening, I gave Jenny a lift to Bury to meet Rachel and they went off to the pictures. I went home to a beer.

I have been converting my old VHS tapes to movies on my computer using Jenny's new laptop and a clever little box manufactured by Hauppauge that connects to a USB 2 port. The box includes a TV tuner as well as taking input from my VHS player so I can watch and record both VHS tapes and television on the laptop. I have even put the odd movie on a DVD. There's no beginning to my talents.

There are two technical problems with this. The first is that the quality of VHS recordings is not very good, but since most of the films I watch are older than I am and in black and white, which I'm not, the original film recording isn't very good either, so it doesn't matter too much. The second is that the file sizes produced are at least twice as big as those produced when recording programmes directly from television on my desktop computer and I haven't worked out why.

On Thursday 4th November, I braved the drizzle to empty and clean the recycling bins ready for the refuse collection the following day and took the opportunity to clear the lawn and patio of leaves for the second time. No doubt a third will be required.

Afterwards, we went off to Asda, I suitably clad in waterproofs for crossing the car park in the pouring rain, to buy all the groceries needed to cater for the Scout training course for 30 people on the coming Saturday and Sunday. This took Jenny about two hours and for the first ten minutes, I potted round the electrical gadgets and the entertainment section of the store, that followed by one hour fifty minutes of sheer boredom. I like eating good food but I don't much like buying or cooking it. A man should know his place.

During the week, I received a growing number of E-mails in my capacity as webmaster for the village, asking about the purchase of tickets for the Scout bonfire. I was wondering where people had found my E-mail address and it occurred to me that they must actually be looking at the village web site. Wrong. The local paper, The Bury Times, had carried an editorial piece about the Scout bonfire in Greenmount and had picked up the information from the web site. At least somebody is looking at it.

The end result is that we had a stream of people arriving at our house to buy tickets, which Jenny was selling on behalf of the Scouts in her role as Beaver Leader. We don't mind because the bonfire is the largest fund-raiser for the Greenmount Scouts and, without it, they would be struggling to make ends meet, like most of us. Perhaps we should open tea rooms as well. We could make a few bob.

Friday 5th was another morning of mental starvation as we made the usual, weekly tour of the rows of grocery shelves at Unicorn and Tesco Prestwich.

On Saturday 6th we were out of bed by 6:30 a.m. and at the Middleton Scout Training Centre by 8:30 a.m. I helped Jenny with the preparation for lunch comprising tomato soup and a variety of sandwiches, followed by jam and cream scones or ginger cake. We also provided the morning and afternoon brews of tea and coffee. My technical skills were required to master the ancient, gas-powered stove, complete with huge overhead extractor fan and box of control electronics with pretty, multi-coloured LED lights. I also applied these same skills to washing the pots, although, at lunch time, this position was rendered redundant by willing volunteers from the training course.

All this "mucking-in" attitude led me to observe that, in fact, voluntary organisations, like the Scout movement, seems to be ones in which things that need doing get done and everyone who is capable of doing so lends a hand. Not only that, but what gets done is for the benefit of the group as a whole and not to the advantage of any one individual or group of individuals. Neither is the Scout movement a private or secret society. Anyone can join and it even welcomes "non-members" like me.

How far is this removed from the highly-paid, selfish, greedy individuals who, when they make a hash of things, expect others to pay for it? If you're in finance or politics, please take special note. Better still, do us all a favour and resign.

Back to the plot.

We arrived back home about 4 p.m. and Jenny immediately started cooking the beef chilli for lunch the following day. We managed tea about 5 p.m. and the three of us left for the Scout bonfire just after 6, Jenny and Rachel being on the "Hook-a-Duck" stall. I ended up on the gate, chatting to the stewards, watching the people arrive. The day had been fine and the rain just about held off in the evening, which accounted for the large attendance. By 8 p.m., the site was so full that the local police asked us to close the gate to people who had not purchased tickets in advance. The bonfire was not as large as usual but the firework display was spectacular.

We left the site about 9:15 and walked back home to a nice cup of tea and bed, aching all

over from standing for most of the day and smelling of smoke.

Sunday 7th was another 6:30 start and more or less a repeat of the previous day, except that lunch comprised jacket potato with chilli, baked beans or cheese topping followed by apple pie or ginger cake topped with custard or fresh, whipped cream. Jenny really enjoyed herself and the group were very appreciative, so much so that we (as in the royal we) have been invited back for the next week-end course.

Lighting the oven to cook the jacket potatoes was a challenge. The pilot light is not visible and the only way of telling if it is lit or not is to listen for it. This involves sticking one's head inside the gas oven, reaching up and holding in the gas supply knob with one hand while reaching down with the other hand to operate the pizo-electric ignition system. Observed in this unusual, kneeling position by some of the group, I was asked if matters were so bad.

My technical skills were also called upon to fix a computer problem, which was a nice, little diversion. The computer needed a reboot, unlike the oven, which needs a good boot.

On arriving back, I fell asleep and Jenny cooked a roast lamb dinner. I woke up just in time to eat it. It's what men do best.

On Monday morning, the heavy rain was back and caused us to postpone a planned potter round Ramsbottom. Jenny cleaned the lounge and I mooched about tidying a few bits and pieces, generally getting in the way.

The weather on Tuesday 9th was not much better and we decided to clean the dining area. Lucky us. By lunchtime, the rain had stopped and we had had enough of dusting and polishing, so we finally managed our outing to Ramsbottom. Anything beats cleaning.

Wednesday 10th was even better. The sun was out, although it was very cold. It then disappeared until Saturday, when it was village spruce-up time again. We joined a depleted group of volunteers, Jenny picking litter round the Bull's Head car park, the church and down the old railway line, now a cycle path, walkway and nature reserve, while Mike and I went down to the village boundary on Brandlesholme Road to plant bulbs along the hedgerow.

On returning, I picked up all the apples that had fallen off our tree at the front, picked up all the twigs and branches the recent high winds had blown off the trees from the grass to the side of the house and binned all the leaves the wind had been kind enough to blow into a pile under the table on the patio. All that before lunch.

Jenny spent the afternoon in the kitchen and I disappeared off into cyberspace, updating the village web site, dealing with E-mails, paying bills and so forth.

The next event worth reporting was on Monday 15th November, when the bright sunshine and blue skies tempted us out on a two-hour, four mile walk round Hollymount, Bottoms Hall and Croitchley Fold, or Walk 3 as it is affectionately known in the local Scout series. This is now documented on the village web site for those with a yen for a stroll and waterproof legs. It is worth noting that, while walking one of the more-overgrown and less-

used paths, we caught sight of a wild deer. We have been told there are a lot of deer in this area but this is only the second we have seen any.

This walk had an interesting detour to view the graveyard at Hollymount. Fascinating. Of even greater interest, if such were possible, this led us on to the old orchard, sadly neglected and overgrown, this is now the subject of restoration work by a local, voluntary organisation based in Ramsbottom called Incredible Edible. The orchard itself is of considerable interest because it is home to a variety of old and traditional English apple trees and it is important to preserve such rarities. English traditions are rapidly disappearing (see my web site www.networking-consultancy.com, and go to Politics under Humour where you will find the poem England).

On Tuesday 16th November, we had been invited to participate in a walk in the Lake District, around Troutbeck. Having looked at the route, involving not one but four of the Wainwright peaks in six and a half hours, with a total ascent of 3,200 feet, we decided that it was a little too much of a challenge. It would have meant rising at 5 a.m. and being on the road for 6, with a two hour drive there and back in addition to the walk itself. Our Plan B (here it is again) is to go and spend a few days at the nice B&B we have found in Ambleside and tackle these peaks at the leisurely pace of one a day. That we should find enjoyable, assuming we are still breathing by the time we reach the top and we don't fall off.

Instead, Ramsbottom had the pleasure of our company once again.

Saturday 20th November saw us tackling walk number four as planned by our former Group scout Leader, Christine Taylor. This was a six mile, three hour stroll along tarmac and rough lanes, linked by overgrown and boggy, cross-country paths, to Roger Worthington's grave. Who's he, you may well ask. There is some controversy over his standing (or, as he is now, laying) in the community. Back in the late 1600s, a bit before my time, according to some, he was a Lay, Baptist Preacher in these parts and, according to his gravestone, the plot where he is laid to rest was donated by Godfrey Ramsbotham Esquire of Levin, New Zealand. Family members, please note.

On Sunday 21st we went for a buffet lunch at the China Lounge in Whitefield with Matthew, Carrie and Carrie's parents, Bob and Marie. The meal was not what I would call good. Then again, it wasn't expensive. I guess you get what you pay for. I don't think we shall be going there again.

The rain kept us in on Monday, except for the evening village meeting.

By the following day it had cleared sufficiently for us to potter round the village taking photographs for the web site. We found some people working on clearing the overgrowth along the nature reserve footpath and I took pictures of them to prove it.

Wednesdays are discount at B&Q DIY stores days and we couldn't resist the 10% off, which probably didn't even cover the cost of the fuel we used. Our route took us via the town hall so that Jenny could drop off her crossing patrol uniform, or it would have done if the police had not over-reacted to the student protest over the planned education cuts and massive hike in university fees from a government (or half of it) that was, before being elected,

committed to abolishing fees. Closed roads and restricted parking made it impossible to drive anywhere near the town hall and I dropped Jenny off and went to wait for her in Tesco's car park.

It wasn't long before Jenny joined me, carrying a large bag of crossing patrol goodies. It seems the town hall offices had been closed for security reasons. If they want their goods back, they can fetch them from us. I don't think they'll sell on the car boot next season.

On Thursday 25th, we set off on walk number five. This was a five mile round walk taking in the narrow, muddy and overgrown paths in Redisher Wood. "To the woods", do I hear you cry? Not at my age and in these freezing conditions. Not without several layers of thermal insulation.

This is the first of the walks where the original instructions were vague in parts and I don't think we followed the intended paths for some of the tour. I have documented the route with the objective of retracing our steps and getting it right next time.

On Saturday 27th, Jenny was helping on a stall at the Old School, at "Santa's Christmas Cracker", the local village Christmas Fair. I wandered round to take yet more pictures for the village web site. I am becoming such a familiar local figure that people actually say hello to me in the street now.

On Sunday 28th we pottered round Ramsbottom and bought this year's Christmas Cards for those people who sent us one last year. In the evening, Rachel had arranged to take us out for a Chinese meal to the popular China Cottage in Ramsbottom. Unfortunately, Rachel was unwell and Jenny and I found ourselves enjoying a lovely meal for two.

Monday the 29th was gremlin day. I spent three hours with Christine Taylor, our former Group Scout Leader and unofficial manager of The Old School, sorting out problems on her desktop computer. That completed successfully, I came home to find Jenny had, in making her mincemeat for Christmas, spilled a packet of millet all over the kitchen floor, the worktop, in the sugar she had weighed out for the mincemeat and in the mincemeat mixture. It had taken her ages to collect it all up and put it back in the packet. Except, of course, for the bit on the floor.

In the afternoon, I decided to try to fix a problem with Nero MediaHome 4, the software on my desktop computer that allows me to share media files with my Sony television. I checked to see if there was an upgrade to my software. There was and I applied it. Afterwards, my television could not even connect to the server. I decided to completely uninstall the Nero software and reinstall it from scratch. After uninstalling it, I reloaded my computer. Well, I would have done, if Windows had not failed to go past the Windows XP loader screen.

I tried everything I could think of to fix it, including loading in VGA and safe modes. Nothing worked and I was about to conclude there was either a problem with my graphics card or the Windows system disc when I hit on the idea of taking off the side of the case and waggling a few wires about (that's a highly technical procedure requiring three year's training and a degree). The loose connection syndrome seemed to have caused the problem and I managed to wake up Windows XP.

I immediately ran a virus scan, just for peace of mind. I didn't exactly get it. The latest version of AVG flagged up several "broken certificates", a kind of security mechanism for downloaded files to prove they are from the company they say they are. It seems this is not a serious threat and is a common issue with the latest version of AVG.

I then backed up all my documents to my external hard drive, including my E-mail and my Registry, on the basis that I can always plug that into Jenny's laptop if the worst comes to the worst.

Finally, I installed the latest version of Nero MediaHome4 from scratch. I tested it with my TV and it doesn't work. Nero software really isn't very good.

Time for bed, as Zebedee used to say.

On Tuesday 30th November, Jenny had been invited to help out at yet another Christmas Fair at the Emmanuel Centre on Longsight Road, about 15 minutes' walk away. That left me with another free morning to wash the pots, empty the recycling bins and clean and set the log fire for the evening.