

Greenmount – November 2013

Friday 1st November saw us leaving St. Neots and heading for the Parish Church at Great Staughton, where Jenny's great, great grandfather married in 1806. We found the church eventually, a little way from the village centre on the west side. It was locked. Fortunately, the minister's name and telephone number was displayed in the porch and, following a quick telephone call, she arrived to unlock it for us. When we explained our mission, she was most helpful and brought out a transcript of the Parish Records, in which she located the marriage entry.

She was not able to find any other information during our brief visit and offered to ask one of her parishioners who is interested in this sort of thing to see if she could help us if I e-mailed my list of requirements to her.

It was not a bad morning and I managed to take a couple of pictures of the church before leaving.

Our journey home went well for the first two and a half hours or so. As we approached the M18 junction on the A1, the traffic information sign indicated that the M62 was closed and advised north-west bound traffic to use the M18 and A616.

We took the M18 to Sheffield and then followed the route from Meadowhall to Ecclesfield, along Woolly Wood bottom, up to Burncross, where we stopped at The Acorn Inn for a pleasant lunch and then on to pick up the Woodhead Pass to Manchester. That's where our troubles began.

It normally takes us about 45 minutes to reach the junction of the M67 and the M60 from Sheffield. On this occasion, the traffic was bumper to bumper all the way to the M67 and the average speed over the Woodhead Pass could not have exceeded ten miles per hour, due to road works on the Pass itself and then traffic congestion at Mottram. The journey took us about two and a half hours.

The M67 was not that busy but by the time we reached the M60 junction, it was too late to divert to Unicorn and Waitrose to go grocery shopping and we headed home. The M60 was busy and that section was not helped by an accident that had closed one lane.

We were home by about 5 p.m., a total of five and a half hours after a nightmare journey that should have taken no more than three and a half hours.

I needed a beer – and got one.

I awoke with a very painful ankle on Saturday 2nd November and could not understand why it was much worse than it had been while I was hobbling about in Cambridgeshire. What was worse is that we had no more Witch Hazel with which to treat it.

After updating my web site with the monthly update for October, we headed for Unicorn and Waitrose, lunching at the latter. We had to be back in reasonable time because Jenny and Rachel were due to help at the Scout bonfire from 5:30 p.m. We called at Tesco in Bury to

pick up some Witch Hazel for my ankle, some 50p a bottle cheaper than Asda. We also needed a Radio Times but Waitrose, Asda and even our local newsagent had sold out.

Shortly after arriving home, we experienced one of the worst electrical storms I have ever seen, with torrential rain and lightning flashes that would put any firework display to shame. As that finished, Jenny and Rachel headed for their stall at the Scout Bonfire.

The heavy rain showers and wind gusts continued. Despite the bad weather, the Scout Bonfire was well attended. The roof of the stall Jenny and Rachel were running ripped apart on one occasion and all the rainwater it was holding back provided Jenny with an unscheduled shower. At least it cleaned her waterproof coat that I had messed up when I mistakenly took it on my last trip to Wales and fell on my ankle, as well as other, softer parts.

Jenny and Rachel came back about 8:45, looking like drowned rats.

I had spent a nice dry, warm evening in, resting my ankle and watching a recording of *Two Way Stretch*, an excellent, old, black-and-white, comedy film starring Peter Sellers.

Sunday 3rd November was the first day for ages on which we had nothing planned and I spent the day tidying up my media on the computer and recoding more of the village web site using XHTML and CSS. What an exciting life I lead.

We decided to start our autumn cleaning, ready for Christmas, on Monday 4th November and, despite my ankle, which was feeling much better, we tackled the lounge and almost finished it – and my ankle, adding twinges in my back for good measure.

We did not rise from our bed until just after ten a.m. on Tuesday 5th November, probably due to a restless night as a result on my back and ankle. I had to be at the dentist for a check up by 11:20 a.m. and breakfast was a bit of a rush.

The visit to the dentist went well and I came away with whiter, brighter teeth and a smile to match. As the sun came out, I thought it was turning into a reasonably nice day.

We found a relatively new card and gift shop at Holcombe Brook, where I bought a most suitable birthday card for Terry, an old school chum of mine.

We paid a quick visit to the herbalist shop in Ramsbottom for another two bottles of organic cranberry juice and I chatted to the herbalist about my ankle, coming away with a free sample of green lipped muscle extract and a small quantity of comfrey root powder, from which we could make a paste and apply as a poultice. The herbalist seemed to be of the opinion that I should have had the ankle x-rayed to check for breaks and that two weeks after the event seemed a little late. She did say that if I could bear weight on it, it was unlikely anything was broken but I suppose it is always best to be sure. I still didn't fancy a four and a half hour wait in A&E unless it was absolutely necessary, though.

On the return journey, we dropped off a card at Alistair's house following their recent sad loss of their son and another at Lynn's house following her mother-in-law's recent passing.

Lunch was followed by a pot washing session.

We turned our attention to finishing off the few remaining jobs in the lounge and that was that for the day.

Wednesday 6th November was a leisurely day, particularly since I was aching a little and my ankle was quite painful following the recent activity. Mike called round for a chat and to see how I was doing. Jenny went to Yoga, returned for a shower and a quick lunch and then went to have her hair cut. What a busy day she had.

Before retiring, I decided to try some of the comfrey root on my ankle and persuaded Jenny to make a paste from a couple of teaspoons-full of the powder from the herbalist. This she did and tried to apply it to my ankle. The mixture looked just like something the cat had deposited, although it did smell a lot better. It wouldn't stick to my skin and was difficult to break up into small pieces, unlike cat do-dos, not that I've tried putting that on my skin.

Jenny eventually applied it to pieces of cotton wool bandage and wrapped this round my ankle, finishing off the whole thing with a piece of elastic hose to hold it in place for the night.

On Thursday morning, 7th November, one of my first tasks was to remove the comfrey root poultice from my ankle. That was easier said than done. The slimy, brown mess had firmly attached itself and took some prizing off. I dumped the waste dressing in the bin in the bathroom, soliciting a comment from Rachel about its appearance. It looked even worse than it had the previous evening.

My ankle was much better for it, though and I was able to spend some time outside in the sunshine clearing up the leaves from the lawn and patio and filling up the garden waste recycling bin before collection the following day. It would otherwise have been an opportunity missed and since we pay for the service, being a Yorkshireman, I thought we might as well make the most of it.

It wasn't until I came in that my ankle started to hurt again and I busied myself completing the previous two weeks' Radio Times crosswords and catching up on some Beaver preparation work.

Since Rachel was out for the evening, we decided to eat out at the Bull's Head after Jenny's Beaver session, taking advantage of a £5 voucher she had received. Waste not, want not.

On Friday 8th November we had a late start to our grocery shopping routine, not arriving at Unicorn in Chorlton until nearly lunchtime, managing to quell the hunger pains until we reached Waitrose at Broadheath. Traffic was worse than usual and the standard of driving appalling.

I spent Saturday 9th November on the computer, doing yet more Beaver administration work and generally tidying things up, resting my ankle in the process.

We were up reasonably early on Sunday 10th November for the Remembrance Church

Parade service. It was after that I discovered a fault on the central heating boiler and logged a call for a British gas engineer the following morning.

Having no heating, I decided to light a fire. What a mistake that was. The smoke backed up and filled the lounge, undoing all the cleaning work of the previous week. I opened up the windows, closed the doors and left it to clear, my clothes giving me the odour of kippers.

I eventually managed to get the fire going and, later in the evening, thought I would give the boiler another chance to heat up the radiators, just to see if it worked. It did. It was most perplexing.

Two (for the price of one) gas men arrived early on Monday morning, 11th November and promptly took the boiler to bits, deciding what might be the cause of what appeared to be an intermittent problem over a cup of coffee. The conclusion was that my boiler had a faulty PCB. I think I must have several. Fortunately, this is one of the parts that is still available for my ageing boiler, unlike my ageing body. The chaps said they would be back first thing the following day with a replacement PCB.

The boiler seemed to function well enough that day, although we were out grocery shopping at Asda for the most of what was left of it, coming back home for a late lunch, after which it was too late to start anything constructive, so I busied myself with more computer work.

Sure enough, the chaps were back early on Tuesday morning, 12th November, for more coffee and fitted the new PCB. Not only did we have a working boiler but it seemed to be working better than it had been for some time. Nevertheless, one of the engineers talked me into having a chat with one of the British Gas sales gentlemen for a free, no-obligation quotation for a new boiler, designed to save me money in the long-run. I'll believe it when I see it.

After he had gone, I waited patiently for Tracey to call me to say she was ready to go round the local businesses in the village to firm up on the Christmas trees we are planning to install on the front of the premises. I was able to complete about half of the Radio Times crossword before she called and Tracey picked me up in her car to go down to Summerseat Garden Centre to look at the lights we were planning on putting on the trees.

That done, we came back and had a very good response from the local trades-people, with trees arriving on 23rd November and the wall brackets to hold them being made and installed by Tracey's company. I was left with the task of looking for suitable lights on the Internet and I was talked into installing an external power supply for the two trees for the Old School.

I arrived back just as Jenny had finished her lunch and had mine, followed by a long rest in the lounge to give my ankle a chance to recover and to finish the Radio Times crossword.

On Wednesday 13th November, we caught the bus into Bury to do some grocery shopping and to buy some bits and pieces of electrical equipment to build a simple circuit for the Beavers as part of their Creative Challenge Badge this week. I was volunteered to teach the Beavers how it all worked.

On this occasion, we lunched at Costa Coffee in Bury's Tesco before shopping there and carrying the heavy bag back to the bus station to catch the bus home. Guess who was nominated for that task. I'll give you a clue. It didn't do my ankle any good.

What was left of the day was again spent on my computer.

On Thursday 14th November we were back in Bury. Rachel had slightly scraped the rear off-side wheel arch of her car and it needed a little expert bodywork, so she drove it to B.M. Autobodies in Bury, an excellent bodywork repair shop that came recommended to me and of which I have made good use. It's a pity they only do cars.

Jenny and I went along for the ride and took the opportunity to nip into one or two shops we missed the previous day. Needless to say, we caught the bus back and spent the rest of the morning on routine chores like washing the pots and preparing for the evening Beaver session, where my skills as an electronics engineer were in great demand, lighting a bulb using a pair of wires and a battery and explaining to the Beavers why it worked. Many of them had already done something similar in school. I took it a step further and showed them the difference between two bulbs in series and in parallel. Clever me.

Friday 15th November was the usual, uneventful and unexciting grocery shopping day at Unicorn and Waitrose with lunch at the latter. My skills were not required for that evening's Beaver session because Jenny had some excellent help from young Scouts.

The boiler was refusing to work properly again and I placed another call for the engineer, immediately after which it burst into life.

On Saturday 16th November the gas engineer arrived to find a fully operational boiler and spent a couple of hours or so trying to find out what was wrong with the expensive piece of Worcester-Bosch junk. He left without finding a problem.

I spent time doing what I know best, updating records on my computer.

On Sunday 17th November Jenny went off up Holcombe Hill on a walk to Pilgrim's Cross with her Beavers for a Remembrance Service with the Beavers, Cubs and Scouts from the Ramsbottom District. Despite the going being very soggy and having to negotiate several peat bogs, Jenny managed not to fall in any, unlike a couple of her Beavers, one of whom went home soaking wet and covered in black slime from head to foot. He enjoyed it immensely.

I would have gone with Jenny but we thought, wisely, that my ankle might not be up to it and I remained at home, doing a few chores around the house and generally tidying up.

Monday 18th November saw a resumption of the decorating work in the kitchen and I managed to paint the ceiling from the hall as far as the extension, including the beam, before the daylight went, what little there was of it. Painting white on white isn't easy at the best of times and with low natural light levels it was inevitable that I would miss a bit here and there.

I was not feeling too energetic on Tuesday 19th November and I was still in my pyjamas and

dressing gown at 10 a.m. when Karen came to collect Jenny for a day out. After they had gone, I burst into life, touched up the bits on the kitchen ceiling I had missed the previous day and then finished off the ceiling in the extension area, between the beam and the back door. I was just tidying up as Jenny returned.

In the evening, I went to the church for a talk on the history of the East Lancashire Railway, given by the chairman of the Preservation Society of which Jenny and I are members.

On Wednesday 20th November, I decided to install the new stainless steel down lights in the kitchen. Unfortunately, the holes in the ceiling where the old, rusty (B&Q) eyeball spots had been were a little jagged and just a little too large. The result was that the new spots did not quite cover the holes as well as I would have liked and I resolved to remake the holes at some point when I had more time.

After lunch, we nipped off to the old school to measure up for the outside sockets I had been asked to install and to B&Q to obtain some prices for the bits and pieces I needed, not that I had any intention of buying them there. First they don't sell MK IP66 weatherproof sockets in store and second they are too expensive.

Jenny, Rachel and I were back at the church in the evening for a brief meeting to discuss the role to be played by the local Scout Group in the service of celebration for the life of Alistair's son, Stanley, recently deceased, on the coming Saturday.

On Thursday 21st November, we had intended to remove the fridge and clean behind it in the kitchen as part of our ongoing decoration/cleaning programme. Somehow, we never got round to that, routine chores and tidying up taking up much of the day.

A faulty boiler first thing in the morning with no heating and having to wash in cold water helped only to bring back fond(?) memories of childhood in a draughty council house with a coal fire, once somebody had got up to light it.

I managed to get the boiler working by switching it off and on again and brandishing a rather large hammer at it while uttering a few strong words. It didn't last, though and by mid afternoon it had given up altogether and even repeating the morning's ritual would not persuade it to relent. Another call for an engineer went in to British Gas for the following morning, demolishing our plans for the weekly grocery shop. Oh dear, what a shame, I thought. Still, it was only postponing the inevitable.

We waited in for the gas engineer on Friday 22nd November, expecting him between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. He telephoned about 12:45 to say he was running late and would not be here until about 2 p.m. He arrived about 2:15 and spent the rest of the afternoon inspecting and testing the boiler while I carried on coding the rewrite of the village web site.

By 5 p.m., he had called in reinforcements and confirmed his suspicions that the main PCB was poorly. He left, saying he would be back with a replacement board, the one I thought the service engineer had originally said was obsolete, on the following Monday.

Not having been shopping and the cupboards being somewhat bare, we ate at the Bull's

Head Toby Carvery. I have added the last bit (Toby Carvery) because the owners, Mitchells and Butlers, who obviously have no regard whatsoever for village life, tradition and individuality, have not yet reinstated the “Bull’s Head” name on the establishment, despite the fact that all the bus timetables and all the locals since the early 1800s have referred to it as such and continue to do so. It’s just another company that’s more interested in profit than people.

Jenny and Rachel went to church to the celebration of the life of Stanley Waddell on Saturday 23rd November and I would have gone with them had I not felt unwell. My brief malady had nothing to do with our meal the previous evening. I know this because I was feeling unwell before I ate. I suspect I had been overdoing it, recalling having been stretching my right side recently, reaching for something. This is the side that bore the brunt of the keyhole surgery to remove my gall bladder many years ago and occasionally this kind of thing happens. The reports were that the church and the Old School, to which the service was relayed on a large screen, were both packed and the Bull’s Head provided food and drink for those who wanted it, closing its doors to the general public.

I had recovered sufficiently to drive to Unicorn and Waitrose after a brief lunch at home, which is just as well given our lack of provisions.

I spent a good deal of the morning of Sunday 24th November trying to coax the boiler back to life and eventually managed to persuade it to produce hot water, albeit intermittently. That was as far as it would go. Heating was out of the question. So, after a brief lunch, I went outside to cut some wood for the fire for the evening and Jenny picked up all the apples that had fallen off the crab-apple tree at the front.

We eventually came in with a box full of wood for the fire and some kindling, only to find the radiators were nice and warm.

We all took it in turn to have a shower while the going was good.

‘Twas on a Monday morning (25th November) that the gas man came to call. It wasn’t the engineer with the replacement PCB. He had telephoned on the Saturday to say he wouldn’t be able to obtain the board until the following day (Tuesday). It was the man who came to sell us a new boiler and the result was that (a) the new equipment would be delivered the coming Thursday (b) the new boiler would be installed the following Monday and (c) I was £3k poorer.

We had been trying to find some time to both finish decorating the kitchen and tidy the garage and we thought we would do at least some of the latter that afternoon. Instead, we ended up doing some preparation for the Beavers on the coming Thursday and Friday, when they were having activities on a Christmas theme.

And so to Tuesday 26th November with, once again, no heating or hot water. It was just like the good old days when I was about five. The gas man arrived with a new Printed Circuit Board, fitted it and tested it. He wasn’t happy the boiler was working properly even though he had managed to restore us back into the 20th century (well, it is an old boiler). It was getting late and Jenny and I went to Bury for a few groceries, leaving him to it. Rachel had

taken the day off due to the lack of hot water for a shower and we left her in charge.

When we returned, the gas man said the boiler was working but he still wasn't happy with it. Neither were we. He said it should hold together until the following Monday, when the new one was scheduled to be installed, provided we kept an eye on the water pressure and kept topping it up as necessary.

Wednesday morning, 27th November, was a warmish one for a change. Jenny and I went up to Rawtenstall to buy some new bow-saw blades from K Supplies so I could continue to cut up the wood for the fire, just in case the worst happened. I was served by one of Jenny's Beaver parents and I then knew where to go for tools at a reasonable discount!

We pottered round Ramsbottom on the return journey and then made our way to Summerseat Garden Centre for lunch.

We had a short rest, catching up on some Heartbeat episodes recorded earlier in the week, followed by a quick and easy salad tea, before walking round to the church for the village meeting. Who said Greenmount wasn't exciting?

We were up early (8:15) on Thursday 28th November to a cold house and no hot water again. I put some water into the system. Although the pressure was not particularly low, the boiler had dumped some excess water outside, through the drain pipe, which suggested either the pressure switch was faulty or there was a fault on the expansion vessel. Not that it mattered because the boiler did burst into life, somewhat reluctantly.

I spent the day on my computer, mostly recoding the village web site and keeping an eye on the old boiler.

My evening, or at least, an hour of it, was spent helping Jenny with her Beavers. They were divided up into five teams, with five bases, at each of which was a different activity on a Christmas theme. At my base, each team was given a word search to complete and I was armed with only paper and pencils. A whip, a chair and a couple of Rottweilers would have been useful.

I was up early again (7:30) on Friday 29th November to take in a grocery delivery from Abel and Cole. By 9:30 we were on our way to Unicorn in Chorlton via Eyre and Elliston in Bury to order the electrical items for installing two external sockets at the Old School for the Christmas tree lights. We were at Waitrose in Broadheath for about mid-day, somewhat earlier than usual and lunched there, as usual.

If you've kept count, that's three lots of groceries thus far and, having bought a few extra items at Waitrose (like two large organic chickens for our freezer because they don't always have big ones, some items with a long shelf-life that were on offer and the odd treat like Green and Blacks Classic Collection and two packs of two chocolate éclairs), it was not surprising that our grocery bill for the week had gone through the roof.

I had the evening off from Beavers and spent it tidying up my receipt folder. My folder for 2013 had become full by the end of October and I had to start another one for all my

receipts since. Either I was starting to be more meticulous about keeping receipts or we were spending a lot more this year than in previous years.

The last day of the month, Saturday 30th November, we were up early again (7:00). That's three days in a row and something of a record since I gave up work.

Jenny had to be round at the Old School for 8:30 to manage a stall at the annual Santa's Christmas Cracker, advertised as a one-stop shop for all your Christmas needs, with tombola, raffle and Santa in his grotto. I remained at home, washing the pots and starting to tidy the lounge, ready for Rachel to put up and decorate the Christmas tree.

I didn't get very far, as I went round to the Old School before the opening at 11 a.m., poised to take the usual round of photographs for the village web site.

I met up with Tracey Hayhoe on the way and she was hanging on to a ladder, up which one of her employees was merrily drilling holes in the wall of the village hairdressers salon, Cream, to put up a holder for a Christmas tree. She had already put up several, with lights, the previous day on the external walls of other business premises in the village, the intention being to bring a festive touch to the village. And very pretty it looked too.

As Jenny and I left the Old School at about 1:30 p.m., I noticed Tracey had also put up two trees on the outside of the Old School, for which I was, with Tracey's help, installing the external sockets the following Tuesday. I had also accosted Frank's wife, Gwen, at the Christmas Cracker and asked her to ask Frank if he would help too, given we had a fair bit of drilling to do.

Jenny and I spent the rest of the afternoon, after lunch, finishing off the lounge and extracting the Christmas booty from the garage loft.

So, as one busy month ended, an even busier one was about to commence. Will the Old School be lit up like a Christmas tree? Will I be lit up like a Christmas Tree? Will we be able to relax in a nice, warm shower instead of enduring the stimulation of a cold one? You will find the answer to these and other totally pointless questions in next month's exciting instalment – and it's all free, folks.