

Greenmount – October 2011

Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October took a political turn as I met with our MP, David Nuttall (Con), at Ramsbottom Library, along with about half-a-dozen other local people for a down-to-earth, no-nonsense, plain-speaking, question-and-answer session. If you believe that, you'll believe anything.

David spent the first ten minutes, or so, of the hour explaining the need for the government spending cuts, not that anybody had asked about them. While explaining that we had to curb our public spending and discussing taxation, I did point out that WE were not responsible for the financial troubles of this country; the fund-managers were. The inference that they should be made to pay for their mistakes somehow escaped our host.

Next up on the agenda was a discussion about parliamentary boundary changes and it appears that the Bury North constituency will continue and will probably take in part of Bolton, specifically, Bradshaw. That should strengthen the Conservative majority and, unlike many others, David's job looks pretty secure. Libraries are supposed to be carrying information about the changes as part of the consultation process.

I managed to ask my first question about the changes to the building planning regulations and David said, essentially, these changes are to simplify the rules and to give local councils more influence over the decision-making process. The wisdom of so doing I find questionable, Bury having given Holcombe Brook Tennis Club permission to build new facilities on a green-field site and Bolton having given Gary Neville (of football fame) permission to build a house on green-belt land. Holcombe Brook Tennis Club has sold its existing land to a developer who is erecting a three-storey care home, much to the appreciation of local residents.

I did see one article about the changes which said that they will make it easier for developers to convert commercial properties into residential ones. My argument is that this country is greatly overcrowded and what we need is fewer people, not more homes.

A lady from Holcombe village raised the issue of traffic speeding through the village. What this has to do with central government beats me. It's a matter for the Police and Local Community Together (PACT) meeting. I was pleased to hear that the police, despite the hardship caused by the cut-backs, have managed to dispatch a mobile camera unit to the village on several occasions which has caught almost 500 offenders over a period of a year, one travelling at 70 m.p.h. past the school in the 30 limit.

This gave David the opportunity to express his support for the motorway speed limit increase from 70 m.p.h. to 80 m.p.h. As far as I can determine, the only effects will be to increase the amount of atmospheric pollutants and allow motorists to travel from one traffic jam to the next a few minutes quicker than was previously permitted, not that the 70 limit stops people driving at 80, or even greater speeds, anyway. Oil companies will be happy with the decision, since vehicles travelling faster will use more fuel and that will boost oil company profits, raising the question of just who exactly runs this country.

The lady did point out that local councils now have the authority to limit traffic to 20 m.p.h outside schools, which is a welcome move, provided, that is, there are any traffic officers left to enforce the law after the cuts.

One issue on which David did score, in my opinion, was his support of our extraction from the EU, which emerged when he was asked a question about the European debt crisis. We have enough problems sorting out our own finances without propping up anyone else's.

Next up was a discussion about the recent riots and the harsher sentencing than usual by the courts of those responsible. The consensus of opinion was that the rioters who were caught got what they deserved. The same, alas, cannot be said of politicians who were caught with their hands in the till. David told us that Ian Duncan Smith is chairing a committee looking into the root causes of problems that lead to crime. I would have thought Exodus Chapter 20, verses 2 to 17 would be a good place to start.

This led on to a discussion about the benefits system, its abuse and the planned reforms. The new Universal Credit, we were told, is designed to make sure that people are better off in work than out of it, that's if they can get work. Incapacity benefit is being reviewed to make sure those who receive it really are not fit for any kind of work and to provide better support for the genuine cases.

A lady also gave examples, mentioning no names, of how the housing benefit system is being abused and we were told major changes are planned, including a cap on the amount that can be claimed.

This same lady also raised the matter of the carer's allowance and how this system is being abused and the fact that job centres are not performing adequate checks on those seeking job-seeker's allowance.

The subject of political asylum and the benefits to which asylum seekers are entitled arose. I did not draw the group's attention to our greatest political asylum – the Houses of Parliament.

It seems that if one knows the benefits system well enough, one could make a career out of it and become quite wealthy. Indeed, it seems some people do.

Inevitably, the discussion led back to the economy, or lack of it, and I asked if the shadow Chancellor's suggestion for a VAT cut was an option. The answer was no. One reason given was that, if it did encourage people to spend more, they would purchase imported goods, manufactured overseas and that would further increase our country's debt. So, having decimated our own manufacturing industry and with cheap imports from China, one partial answer to our debt crisis seems to be to stop spending. How, exactly, does that boost our economy?

At that, our time ran out and I did not get to my second question about DEFRA granting permission for GM wheat to be grown in this country. I am wondering why DEFRA allowed this. The strategy seems to be to produce greater yields that are resistant to insects. Why do we need to increase our yield when the world already produces 1½ times as much

food as we need to feed everyone? As far as starvation is concerned, the issue is not one of enough food, it's one of distribution and the lack of will to ensure no-one goes hungry. As far as increasing yield is concerned, bigger crops mean bigger profits.

In any case, the long-term use of GM crops doesn't increase yield. The GM modifications find their way into other plants and animals and create herbicide resistant weeds and pesticide-resistant pests. Would that there were a GM modification to reduce greed.

And let's not forget that DEFRA is the same organisation that has never classed Plutonium, a highly-toxic, waste product from nuclear reactors, as such. Why? Because it can be refined and reused – to make bombs.

Which leads me on to my third question about our future energy policy. Nuclear energy is a definite no-no and I should know because I nearly studied nuclear engineering, changing to electronics when I discovered just how dangerous it was.

For those of you who know a little less about it, here are a few facts:

- Finland is building a large, deep-underground storage-facility for its nuclear waste at Onkalo, designed to last 100,000 years. Nothing built by man (or woman) has lasted one tenth of that time.
- In 1957, Pile 1 at Windscale (now Sellafield) caught fire and dumped radio-active Iodine into the atmosphere. The government at the time concealed the incident from the public. The official figures, when eventually released, put the death toll at 32 and subsequent deaths from cancer at 260. Independent experts put the death toll at over 1,000. The core is still too radioactive to be dismantled.
- DEFRA has never considered Plutonium to be a waste product of nuclear reactors. As at July 2005, we had 80,000 cubic metres or over 100,000 tonnes of high activity waste. Plutonium 238 decays to half of its potency every 4,510,000,000 years. A microscopic particle is fatal.

A recent BBC Horizon programme asked the question "Is Nuclear Power Safe". It looked at both Fukushima and Chernobyl. It didn't mention Sellafield (too close to home perhaps?) The programme stated at the outset that it wanted to discover the facts. Towards the end, it looked at nuclear waste and an experimental project to transmute highly-radioactive elements into less-harmful elements. Alchemists have tried to transmute lead into gold for centuries. My impression was that the programme attempted to convince people that the risks associated with nuclear power were worth taking.

Do we have the right to make such dangerous decisions that affect generation upon generation to come? We only have to look at the last couple of hundred years and the toxic legacy we have in the environment today from manufacturing processes – chromium, asbestos, arsenic, mercury to name but four – and the misery these are causing. If we could go back and prevent the pollution resulting from the industrial revolution, would we do so?

The answer is no. The politicians wouldn't because it would have stopped the greedy from getting rich.

If you're one of the greedy rich, just remember, rich kids aren't immune.

If you're not, it's up to you to shape the future and, quite probably, save it.

Well, we're on Page 3 (no, there aren't any pictures) and only the second day of October. Being the first Sunday of the month, it was Church Parade and Jenny, Rachel and I went to Church, Jenny and Rachel with the Beavers. Andrew, once more, delivered a most entertaining service with a good deal of participation from the children and including a baptism. It also gave me a rare opportunity to put on my Sunday best and meet up with a few people to discuss village matters.

On Monday I was back in my rags and waterproofs, not that I needed them, for an 11½ mile walk with the village hiking group. We climbed up onto Holcombe Hill and crept up on Peel Tower from behind. From there it was downhill to Ramsbottom, a brief toilet stop in Nuttall Park and another climb up Jacob's Ladder to the remains of Grant's Tower, where we took another short and very welcome break. We pressed on to Nangreaves and, following a very boggy path, down to Burrs, where we sat down at the picnic tables for lunch.

The two ladies in the party made a dash for the toilet, these being open to cater for what seemed to be a school party visiting the historic site, only to be told by some over-zealous official that they could not use the toilets because they were not intended for public use. The ladies suggested that their only alternative was to find a tree, with which the official concurred. It's people like that who give Lancashire a bad, not to mention smelly, name.

We walked back up a path from Burrs that came out by the site of what used to be the Phoenix pub on Brandlesholme Road. Crossing the main road took us on the access road to the Kirklees valley and we emerged by Tower Farm, following the old railway track back to Greenmount.

Tuesday and Wednesday were Beaver preparation days, with plans for both Colonies (Thursday and Friday) to make model cars out of egg boxes, punctuated with brief trips out to Bury and Ramsbottom.

On Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> October, Jenny went to lunch with her friend, Karen, and I went to fix a few problems for Mike on his desk-top and lap-top computers.

On Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October it was my turn for lunch at the Bull's Head with Mike and Frank after spending the morning painting the Old School cellar.

Friday was the usual grocery shopping day at Unicorn and Tesco Bury. For some strange reason, known only to Tesco, their Bury branch seems to have a better choice of organic meat than the Prestwich store and has organic items not available at Prestwich. Even more perverse is that Prestwich has organic items not available in Bury.

While at Unicorn, I picked up a leaflet advertising a meeting entitled Hunger for Justice, organised by the World Development Movement ([www.wdm.org.uk](http://www.wdm.org.uk)). I subsequently had a peek at their web site. What an eye-opener that was, but, then it would be if I was peeking.

How many of you know that the major party of our present Government coalition receives huge funding from the City of London? Yes, it's fairly obvious the Conservative party is funded by big business, isn't it? Now how many of you know that a good proportion of this funding comes out of the proceeds of hedge fund management? Ah, not so many of you. And now for the crunch question. How many of you know that a good proportion of hedge fund management is as a result of speculation in food products, pushing up the price of food and even controlling its supply? More importantly, how many of you care? Obviously not enough of you, otherwise this Government wouldn't be in power.

On Saturday, we contented ourselves with a trip to Ramsbottom and it was quite picturesque to see the steam engines in the station amid all the rain and gloom. I noted that the footplate was probably one of the warmer and more comfortable and certainly more interesting places to be on such a day.

Worthy of note was the very kind and helpful chap on the bread counter at Morrisons Supermarket. Bury Tesco, on the previous day, had no organic bread sticks and when we have enquired before about their availability in the past, the attitude of the staff there has been one of apathy. We thought we'd try our luck at Morrisons, fully expecting the same response. To our pleasant surprise, the chap offered to bake us two fresh sticks there and then and said they would be about twenty minutes, which we spent wandering round the store, buying a few more things we didn't know we needed. We went back to the counter to collect our fresh, warm, bread sticks. While the strategy of this approach did not escape me, it occurred to me that if Morrisons stocked more organic products, not available at Unicorn, we would boycott Tesco completely, simply because Morrisons' service is much better.

On Saturday night we went to the quiz at the Old School. While it was intended for teams of four, there were six of us, so we pushed two tables together and then split ourselves into two teams of three, one male and one female. Out of five rounds of twenty questions, we (the chaps) managed 54 and the ladies 49½. I think I got 2. The winning team scored over 60.

On Sunday, we went round to the Old School to help out with the village Treasure Hunt and, despite the terribly wet weather, the number of participants approached double figures, including some children. The plan to finish at Hollymount Orchard was quickly and wisely amended, adopting our old favourite, Plan B, to finish at the Old School, where Jenny stayed on to administer tea and cakes to the damp and needy.

The torrential rain continued on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> October and the waste bins in the kitchen were full to capacity and beginning to adopt a microcosmic life of their own, with associated odours, I not having had time to go out and empty them in the few brief fine spells we have had over the past week or so. As if by magic, after typing the above sentence, the rain stopped long enough for me to empty the bins. I must write a paragraph about not winning the lottery.

I have started to read what was intended to be the final draft of the Ralph Rooney book from the printers, only to find more minor corrections. Proof reading is not easy, this being the proof.

The rest of the day was taken up with cutting more logs for the fire and dodging the huge

spiders that have made their home amongst them. While none of our spiders are poisonous, I have discovered that some of them can render a nasty, irritating bite and they do seem to be getting bigger. Perhaps the insects they've been eating have been feeding on GM crops.

After the previous day's frenzied activity, on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> October I turned my attention to ways of earning some money. I have been intending to run a session at The Old School on researching family history, based on my experiences – at least, those that are repeatable. The biggest drawback is that I do not have a projector to display my computer graphics on a large screen. The first task was to find one. After some investigation of the marketplace, I added one costing about £2k to my wish list and thought it might be a good idea to borrow one from a friend to run a pilot session before investing so much of my dwindling capital. If this is successful and leads to my running an on-going group, I might make enough to pay for one.

I set about the second task of preparing a Powerpoint presentation.

My efforts were punctuated on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> October with yet another morning in the cellar of the Old School, paintbrush in hand, after which, Mike, Frank and I adjourned to the pub for a three-hour lunch break.

The day ended in disaster as my server entered Hermit Mode and refused to talk to anything. After spending a couple of hours trying to fix it, I switched everything off and went to bed.

On Friday 14<sup>th</sup> October, I switched on my PC and got out the vacuum cleaner. The server's air intakes were full of dust and I had been meaning to clean them for some weeks. Just because it was poorly was no excuse for it not being clean, as my mum used to say to me. Having removed various cables and sucked out the fluff from every crevice, using the vacuum cleaner, I might add, I reconnected it and switched it on.

The first sign of life was when the web services appeared on my PC screen. So far, so good, I thought. Trying E-mail was stretching things a little but even that met with about 67% success, the only failing aspect being my inability to receive mail sent to my Networking Consultancy count. Fixing that took me another hour, logging into my account using the web browser interface, inspecting and deleting messages. For some strange reason, that seemed to solve the problem.

Quite what I did to rectify the fault(s) and what caused it/them, I have no idea. Obviously my 40 years or so at the sharp end of IT support did come in useful somewhere amongst all the fiddling about.

The day's anti-climax came when Jenny decided it was time to go shopping.

Friday night saw the start of a rather disruptive week as, one by one, we all succumbed to a rather nasty virus inflicting sickness and diarrhoea. Jenny was the first casualty, recovering in a couple of days, just in time to look after me. I wasn't back in circulation until Thursday, by which time Rachel had also joined in. All I can say is that it was a relief, in more ways than one, to know we had two loos, both upstairs, which, for those of us on our feet was a bit of a trek, as in "two loos le trek".

We did manage a trip out to the shops on Wednesday, planned carefully for both our and the public convenience.

On Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October, I met with Brian at the Old School for another session in the cellar and I spent the afternoon making magnetic fishing rods for the Beavers that evening and the following evening, helping out at both sessions.

Since we had not eaten much during the previous week, the shopping on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October was limited to Bury, Tesco having applied their organic meat shortage to the poultry section.

Saturday, Sunday and Monday were taken up with the Jumble Sale at The Old School.

Over the next couple of days I managed to get out in the garden in the late autumn sun and tidied up the back. A couple of trees needed some branches removing but not as much as I needed the resultant bag of wood for the fire.

On Thursday we were grocery shopping in Bury, not needing much, since Jenny and Rachel went off to York for a few days on Friday. I drove them to Piccadilly station and spent the rest of the day cutting the very long and wet grass on the front wilderness. It looked worse after I had finished than it did when I started. I did manage to cram in a couple of hours weeding the block paving at the front before retiring to prepare tea. There's never a dull moment.

Saturday started well, my intention being to finish the front block paving, until it started to rain, that is. The 29<sup>th</sup> was also the deadline for returning the acceptance of my invitation from Greenpeace to the launch of Rainbow Warrior III in London, including a boarding pass. I would like to have gone but I have too much to do here and it would have been too expensive.

The morning saw an unexpected visit from a couple of the Jehovah's Witnesses. They normally call on Friday when we are out grocery shopping. Grocery shopping does have its advantages. The two gentleman, Michael and Donald, were very nice and we chatted for some time, not, most unexpectedly, about religion. I quickly discovered that Donald, who hails from Jamaica, is a jazz fan and plays the clarinet in a band, having once been on the same bill as Humphrey Lyttleton. Michael didn't get much of a word in, informing me that Donald was 76 and he didn't look a day over 50. He put his good health and young appearance down to good organic food and his religious beliefs. You can't argue with that.

In the evening I had my first, early and unexpected visit from "Trick-or-Treaters". They went away satisfied with a small candy bar each.

It was past lunchtime on Sunday before I realised I should have put back the clocks. It just goes to show that I never know what time it is. What's even worse, I forgot to remove my tea (shepherd's pie) from the freezer until after lunch and by the time it should have gone into the oven it was still as hard as rock. Plan B was roast chicken, which is what I had the

evening before. At least that gave me an excuse to finish the bottle of white wine I had started the previous evening.

On Monday 31<sup>st</sup> I took stock of the wood in the garage and decided to cut some more, having less than a week's supply ready. The first session with a very thick log of silver birch went well and rendered a couple of bags. I then decided to tackle one of the 3 metre or so lengths of log that had been under the car port for some months. This proved difficult, the band saw sticking regularly. In the end, a combination of band saw and cross-cut saw yielded results but it took me a good couple of hours to cut just three pieces, two of which chopped nicely into logs and the third is still in one piece awaiting a stick of dynamite. In my enthusiasm, the metal handle of the cheap B&Q axe came out of the hole in the head and almost gave me one. Since it must originally have been fitted by heat shrinking, there was no way I can repair it. I now need a new axe and I think it's off to K-Supplies who sell quality trade tools – at a price.

In the evening, there were a handful of “Trick-or-Treaters” but not as many as expected. The bowl of goodies we had in stock in readiness will now be donated to the Beavers, not wishing to imply they are little horrors.

And so ends another eventful month here in soggy Greenmount and if you've stayed the pace and managed to read all eight pages of this account, all I can say is, the answer is 45.