

Greenmount–September 2009

There are a couple of items I forgot to include in my August update so I shall commence with them here. Better late than never, as the saying goes. You might not think so after you have read them.

Towards the end of August, I was the lucky recipient of my own, personal bowel-testing kit, although it took me until early September to convert the written instructions into a practical, if somewhat messy, procedure. Those of a nervous disposition should skip the next few paragraphs.

The idea is to provide two samples from different parts of the same bowel movement on each of three separate days, for which six small cardboard sticks are provided. Each sample is then placed on a small area of card less than 1 cm square. Imagine how difficult that would be without the sticks.

The samples are sealed and posted off to the laboratory for testing. Anyone tampering with my mail is in for a surprise. The test screens for potential bowel cancer.

So far so good. Putting this into practice requires a good degree of planning, as anyone familiar with muck-spreading will, no doubt, know. To say that it gets everywhere, no matter how careful you are, is an understatement. I now realise how much truth is in the saying about waste products hitting the fan.

I never thought I would be glad of latex gloves. The trick is to catch the motion in motion, as it were, to avoid contact with the toilet bowl, which would otherwise cause cross-contamination and possibly give a false or indeterminate reading, requiring a retest. Anything but that.

Apart from the mess, or perhaps as a result of it, one cannot avoid the associated and prolonged odour, even with a powerful, ceiling-mounted extractor fan, from the bulk of which one is normally protected by the fact that much of what one excretes lies under water until flushed out of sight and mind, not to mention other bodily parts.

The test is repeated every two years between the ages of 60 and 75 so I can look forward to many more enthralling experiences over the next fifteen years or so.

Of course, the whole process is voluntary and one does not have to participate; still, poking around in the proverbial has to be better than being landed in it.

I am pleased to tell you that the whole procedure was well worth the effort and the disinfectant. A few days after posting off my samples, I received a letter advising me that I have a healthy colon and I shall be receiving another testing kit in two years' time. Oh, goody.

I completed and filed my 2008-9 tax return online and the tax man owes me money yet again. What I shall do with the fifteen pence, I have not yet decided.

During the first week or so of September, my PC started to fail, closing down Windows and trying to reload itself unpredictably. What was even more worrying was that I received a message on the screen saying that the CPU had been replaced or was unworkable when it did try to reload. It can't be the lack of a screening programme because it already has video drivers (that's a subtle technical joke for the technocrats amongst you).

Fortunately, I had just completed the transfer of my web site (www.networking-consultancy.com) to Matthew's server, so that was unaffected. Not that many people would notice, I guess. I did lose some TV recordings I had scheduled and access to all my data and films on the connected 2.5 Terabytes (that's two and a half thousand million bytes, one byte being equivalent to a single character, for the non-technocrats amongst you) of disc space.

I managed to reload the computer long enough to copy all my documents (not my films, though) to a large, external disc I recently purchased and I have now backed that up to seven (my lucky number) DVDs.

It took me a day or two to work out that the problem was probably temperature related and I decided to give the internals a good clean. The CPU fan and heat sink were completely clogged with dirt and the refitting of these items required a quick trip to PC World on a Sunday morning to purchase a tube of thermal-conducting cement to bond the heat sink back onto the processor, having cleaned the surfaces with isopropyl alcohol (or cd/dvd cleaning fluid).

Once re-assembled, the PC loaded up and after fiddling with some BIOS settings (the things you don't fiddle with if your not that way inclined), it now seems to be working quite well again. Perhaps someone should fiddle with my BIOS settings.

The whole process cost me £7 for the cement as opposed to about £1k to replace all the internals except the discs and upgrade the system to a faster machine with the newly released (in October) Windows 7, a course of action about which I was quite becoming excited.

On 10th September, Jenny was on her way to take her Beavers meeting at The Old School when she tripped and fell on the uneven pavement about thirty paces up the road. And she was sober at the time. Two neighbours, who witnessed the accident, picked her up, brought her home, a little shocked, with cuts on both hands and grazes to both knees and one arm. Fortunately, she had not broken any bones.

Having cleaned and dressed the wounds, she went to her Beaver meeting, which was in the capable hands of Rachel and a couple of parent-helpers.

She had quite a lot of bruising and was in some pain for a few days, although she refused to take any time off her work on the school crossing patrol.

I reported the incident to the local council and a representative came to see me and assured me that the pavement would be repaired, especially when I told him I had taken pictures of the area. One hole was been filled in even before he appeared and the uneven paving repaired a few days later. The bigger hole in the council's budget prevents them from resurfacing the whole pavement and I shall be complaining to my local councillor about the state of the pavements and the roads. No doubt he will complain to me about the lack of funds and I shall then take the matter to my MP who has more than his fair share of cash after allegedly fiddling his expenses.

My birthday was on the 16th. Co-incidentally, it fell on the same date last year. I am another year older (62), though not necessarily wiser and certainly not richer.

I have received a letter from the local council about the local newsagent's planning application appeal concerning the expansion of his business. If you recall, he wants to bring the front of his shop out to the edge of the pavement, destroying the line of terrace properties, of which his is a part, which has existed since the late 1800s. The local council dismissed his application and he appealed against the decision. I am pleased to say that his appeal has also been dismissed (should I say in spite of his ethnic origin, since, in the present political climate, positive discrimination – or, more precisely, discrimination against white Christians—seems to prevail in this country).

If the National Front is gaining ground in the polls, successive ruling bodies over the last seventy years or so have only themselves to blame.

I wish to report having seen the sun on a couple of occasions during the past four months. Having rained on every one of the past ninety or so days, we have had over a week of dry weather, although the grey cloud prevails for most of the time. It soon turned back to damp and drizzle. This climate does not improve, politically or otherwise.

The lounge radiator is finally back on the wall and connected to the central heating system again. The pipes are not very tidy and that needs sorting out but they are, for the most part, hidden from view and it is such a messy job that I have decided to leave it for now.

Despite being damp and dull, it is still reasonably mild and we have been warming the cooler evenings with the log fire and the odd glass of malt. In fact, the fire warms the lounge so much, one is inclined to remove layers of clothing rather than put them on. The burn rate is controlled by the air vents on the front of the stove and the amount and quality of female company.

The next big project is the landing, staircase and dining room. The plan is to remove all of the textured ceiling paint and the cork tiles from the staircase wall, re-plastering as necessary. I also intend to replace the landing flooring, thereby, at long last, fixing the

hole in the floor, through which, so far, thankfully, no-one has put their foot. The carpet covering the whole area, like me, has seen better days and the plan is to lay a wooden floor in the dining room and replace the skirting. The dining room is also very dark and I keep thinking about installing a window in the outside wall, which means repositioning all of the furniture and the radiator.

That sounds like a job for after Christmas.