

Greenmount – September 2012

I was in the unusual position of starting this month's update before finishing the last. I don't seem to have the time to add exciting news on a daily basis and when I do finally manage to put finger to keyboard, I can't remember what it is I did on the previous few days. My memory isn't what it used to be. I do recall enough to know it was pretty bad. It's just as well Jenny keeps a daily diary of the old fashioned kind.

So here we are in September already this year and I find myself wondering where time has gone. There are already signs of autumn and it would have been nice if there had been some summer.

On 1st September we visited Jenny's niece, Tracey and my sister Barbara in Sheffield.

Tracey was having trouble with two HD DVD recorders and I had offered to have a look at them. Neither would power on and I was not hopeful. I have the same problem, intermittently. I said I would bring them home to look at them in more detail.

By a strange coincidence, Barbara was also having similar trouble with her HD DVD recorder and I brought that home as well. Meanwhile, she had bought a new one which I installed for her. Barbara also gave me an old, working, VHS recorder for good measure, intended for the car boot stock.

With all this modern(?) electronic gadgetry suitably hidden from view in the car, we called at the Beefeater at Heaton Park for our evening meal on the way home.

On 2nd September, to recover, we biked down the old railway line to Burrs Country Park and back. Jenny was fine until we came to the short, steep, uphill section on the return journey, which she managed but with some discomfort. Apparently she only does flat bits and hills when the go downwards. Her investment in padded cycling shorts and a gel saddle proved to be worthwhile.

On 3rd September we were back in Beaver mode and the highlight of the day was a stroll up to Pets in Need on Turton Road, Tottington to carry out a Risk Assessment for the coming Beaver visit. I knew learning to do these during my time with iSoft would come in useful one day.

On Tuesday 4th September, I met Tracey at the Incredible Edible plot at 11:00 and we cut and fitted the plank missing from the last raised bed and fitted Visqueen sheeting to the inside of the first three beds to protect the wood before deciding to retire to the Bull's Head for a quick pint. Donna, who is driving this project, arrived after Tracey had gone and just as I was leaving. She thanked us for our sterling work. After chatting for a few minutes, I drove my car, having my tools in the back, home and then dashed round to join Tracey in the pub. She was about to send out a search party for me.

I had arranged a dental appointment on Wednesday 5th September to finalise the root canal work on my upper right molar. Unfortunately, it was at 11:00 and, with at least two hours for the filling to set, I was feeling somewhat peckish by the time I could eat again. The drilling, filling and six-monthly clean took about half an hour, which I thought was pretty good considering the depths to which my dentist had to probe. I thought her finger had disappeared at one stage. When she spoke, there was definitely an echo. Mind you, I wasn't unduly worried until I heard the cement mixer start up.

I spent much of the rest of the day recovering from the ordeal and dribbling out of the side of my mouth.

I managed to squeeze an hour and a half or so to cut the grass on the side of the house before mad Max from the council came and ploughed up the area with his motorized Formula 1 combined mower and grass spreader. It was hard going, the grass being long in patches and quite wet underneath. It didn't help that my mower needed a new blade.

In the evening, we went to the village meeting at Cormar Carpets, at which Alistair asked me to take notes for him as his wife (Secretary) was unavailable. I told Tracey that I thought the calculation I had made for the chippings at the IE plot was wrong and we needed more than I had thought. I said I would check the volumes and confirm them with her.

The highlight of Thursday 6th September was lunch at the Bull's Head. We were, or rather Jenny was, thinking of going down to Summerseat Garden Centre but the Bull's Head is nearer and we were walking because the car's tank was about empty. My tank also being empty, I settled on a pint of Wainwright's Ale while Jenny had her caffeine fix by way of a pot of tea. We sat in the garden at the back, enjoying the nice day, while waiting for my Turkey Jalfrezi (at long last) and Jenny's Turkey sandwich. I enjoyed my lunch but Jenny did not think her sandwich was as good as the ones at the Garden Centre. We resolved to try the Hare and Hounds at Holcombe Brook, which is fine with me because it's a free house with lots of decent ales on tap.

We returned home via the IE plot so I could double-check the measurements of volumes of top soil and chippings needed. I completed the calculations back home, basking in the sunshine on the patio. I then came in to use the computer to convert volumes to weights and confirmed to Tracey that we needed between 5 and 6 tonnes of soil. I also told her that I was right about being wrong as regards the chippings and that we needed three tonnes, not two. She suggested we go with the two and see how far it went.

On Friday 7th September, not unexpectedly, mad Max turned up and the whole area looked like it had been raining grass. How he managed to avoid getting it on the roof, I'll never know. We left him to it, working hard drinking coffee as we passed on our way to Bury.

The first stop was at B&Q, Crosstones to buy a new blade for the mower. It occurred to me that, had I bought it on Wednesday, I could have used my discount card and saved

10% of the £17. What's more, I could have used the bus for nothing with my bus pass. It's a pity it didn't occur to me on Wednesday.

The second stop was at Tesco, Bury, to refuel the car, otherwise the third stop might have been well before Chorlton.

We eventually arrived at Unicorn for our weekly supply of organic fruit and veg., together with other organic products we wanted that were stocked by Unicorn. The return journey was punctuated with a second visit to Tesco in Bury, this time mainly for organic meat and line-caught fish. The in-store café operated by Costa Coffee provided us with non-organic lunch and I was able to walk into Bury market for a box of Doves Farm Organic Breakfast Cereal and a bottle of our favourite Cranberry juice.

The cereal, containing Buckwheat, used to be called Buckwheat Cereal. Now there's a surprise. Of late, the Buckwheat in the title has been dropped for some reason, presumably because of some European directive objecting to the name on the basis of the amount of this particular cereal content not meeting the legislative requirement to justify the description. It's good to know that our taxes are well spent.

I would have bought two bottles of juice had the Health Food store had them but despite increasing their weekly stock level to three, there was still only one on the shelf. The assistant assured me they would increase their stock level again. One day it might even reach double figures.

On Saturday 8th September, all three of us spent the day at the Scout District Jubilee Camp at Ashworth Valley, between Bury and Rochdale. Jenny was expecting 14 Beavers, of which 12 turned up. Had I known this in advance, I need not have gone and could have put the day to good use, gardening, this being one of the few fine days we have had this year. Jenny had organised two parents to come along and help, which, for the numbers, would have been enough supervision.

Keeping track of 12 six to eight year-olds on a large campsite is harder than herding sheep and I'd forgotten to bring a whip and a chair. To say the day, from arriving at 9 a.m. to leaving at 7:30 p.m., was exhausting is an understatement. The reward was that everyone, especially the children, had a good time and it's great to see kids enjoying themselves.

After that, Jenny didn't have the energy or inclination to cook an evening meal, so we staggered across to the Bull's Head for a late tea and crawled home, one round of drinks and a bottle of Chardonnay later.

On Sunday 9th September, not surprisingly, we rose late and I spent much of the day recovering, in front of my PC, or, to be more accurate, Jenny's laptop, editing recorded TV shows, recorded music from the radio and generally sorting out my media, which is proving to be a long, slow process.

In the early afternoon, Jenny requested my assistance to bring in the washing as the lovely, warm morning had started to produce large raindrops. The threat of rain soon passed and the two lines of washing were back out just as fast as we had fetched them in.

Since I was on my feet, I decided to gather in the blackberries that were ripe. Our raspberries and blackberries have fared a little better this year but not as well as they would have done with less rain and more sun.

After that, I was on a roll and put the fine weather to good use, trimming back the ivy on the garage wall and a bush that was encroaching on my blackberries, acquiring a small quantity of kindling for my wood-burner in the process.

We did not have enough blackberries for jam so Jenny put them in a pie. Yum.

On Monday 10th September, we tidied out the garage. Yippee.

On Tuesday 11th September, I was back at the IE plot with Tracey fitting the Visqueen to the fourth raised bed, followed by the obligatory round of drinks in the Bull's Head. I did intend buying this round and, having no cash, went to the in-house cash machine to extract some drinking vouchers. When the machine, previously dispensing cash for free, wanted to charge me 75p to give me £50 of my own money, being a true Yorkshireman, I cancelled the transaction. So that's two rounds to Tracey and none to me.

Wednesday 12th September turned out to be a mid-week shopping day at Asda Pilsworth, after a long natter with my sister, Edith, in New Zealand on Skype. How modern technology shrinks the world. It's not the same as being there, though, so I'm waiting for the Transporter. Beam me up, Scottie.

In the afternoon, I printed out copies of a letter to local residents and businesses near the Incredible Edible plot to tell them about the disruption likely to be caused by the delivery of bulk items on the coming Saturday morning and asking them not to park in the area. It was then time to explore uncharted territory and deliver them. I did subsequently have a couple of calls from local residents, who were very nice about it all.

On Thursday 13th September, we finally made a start on preparing the small bedroom for Sue and Wills who were on a flying visit (literally) from NZ and who were scheduled to stay with us on the 19th. It really needed redecorating and a lot of TLC but it had to wait.

After lunch, we went round to the Old School to laminate some notices telling people they could not park on the waste ground near the Incredible Edible plot on Saturday morning between 8 and 9 a.m. because we were expecting the delivery of top soil and stone chippings. I fixed the notices to the railings of the church grounds facing the parking area, giving me some of the exhilaration felt by Traffic Wardens.

And so to Friday 14th September, our weekly grocery shop at Unicorn in Chorlton and Tesco in Bury, with lunch in Costa Coffee at the latter. We had a couple of hours spare,

during which I started to update the village web site, before my photographic skills were in demand at the Beaver session. The Beavers were visiting Pets at Home in Bury for their Animal Friend Activity Badge and the session went very well, although I'm not sure the animals thought so.

On the way back, I called at the Cricket Club to pick up some barriers to block off the parking area near the Incredible Edible plot in readiness for the delivery of soil and stone chippings the following morning. I dropped Jenny off at the Old School so she could help Rachel run the Cub session. Rachel normally helps Peter, who runs it, but he was away and had asked Rachel to run it for him. I popped in to collect some cones to add to the barriers and was relieved that I wasn't involved.

I dropped off the barriers and positioned them at the parking area before coming home to feed the cats and finish off the web site update.

The girls arrived back home at 7:45 to find me resting in the chair with my feet up and one of the cats laid full length on my legs. I'm not sure which of us was more comfortable.

It turned out to be a long day, with tea being dished up at about 9 p.m.

I had to be up early on Saturday 15th September to be at the IE plot for about 7:30. I had to make sure the lorry had access to make its delivery between 8 and 9 a.m. When I arrived, no-one had parked on the waste land, as requested and I cordoned off the area, taking up a strategic position on the bench at the corner to await the delivery and any coppers people wanted to drop in my hat.

Six bags of soil and two bags of stones later, I removed the barriers and the parking area filled up in minutes. Tracey had already arrived and Frank soon joined us to help barrow the soil into the beds. We also had help from Alistair, Donna and some local residents. The small amount of surplus soil we used to back-fill the existing small beds at the rear, by the wall. The raised beds filled to capacity and the soil fully deployed, we turned our attention to the stones and spread these on the path areas around the beds. All went well until we ran out of the stones around the last bed.

We resolved to order an additional bag of stones and, since Tracey was going on holiday the following Saturday for two weeks, it was left with me to arrange and pay for the third bag.

Meanwhile, Jenny had her hair done.

I came home, changed and Jenny and I had a well-earned lunch with Frank in the Bull's Head.

On Sunday 16th, despite having completed my 65th year, we took Rachel to Bury and then cleaned the dining area, including the candle sticks. I collected Rachel from Bury while Jenny cooked tea, which seemed an appropriate division of labour.

On Monday 17th September, we called at June's to drop off her birthday card on the way to Redisher Wood. We were on another Risk Assessment survey in readiness for Beaver Pond Dipping (where the Beavers fish around for pond life rather than being dipped in the water). We took the barriers back to Cricket Club, not that anyone had missed them and then had lunch at Summerseat Garden Centre.

Tuesday 18th September was time to replace the tin foil on the cooker hob. Jenny hit on the idea of covering the hob under the gas burners with foil to protect it from spillage and becoming dirty. I had the job of cutting the foil to fit. I also had the job, yet again, of emptying the recycling bins we keep in the kitchen.

On Wednesday 19th we expected my niece, Sue and her husband, Bill, from New Zealand. That didn't stop us going to Asda at Pilsworth. Sue and Bill arrived at 6:30 p.m., which wasn't bad timing, really, as we had booked a meal at 7:30 for nine people at the Wagon and Horses at Hawkshaw, the pub being run by Tracey's (of IE plot fame) sister, Liz and her Scottish husband, Steve, who does the cooking. The nine were Sue and Bill, Frank and Gwen, Matthew and Carrie, Jenny, Rachel and yours truly, O.A.P. The event was a dual celebration of Sue and Bill's brief visit and my 65th birthday.

Returning home, we had a long Skype conversation with my sister, Sue's mum, Edith.

On Thursday 20th September, the piano tuner arrived and proceeded to entertain us all over breakfast and for a good time afterwards. We had lunch at Summerseat Garden Centre and we dropped Sue and Bill at the tram station in Bury as they departed for London to visit Bill's daughters before returning to New Zealand via Hong Kong.

On Friday 21st September, we went grocery shopping to Unicorn, lunched at Costa Coffee in the Tesco store at Prestwich and, for good measure, shopped at the store as well. Not satisfied with the day's entertainment thus far, I accompanied Jenny's Beavers on their Pond Dipping excursion to Redisher Wood and, miraculously no-one managed to fall in the water.

On Saturday 22nd September, the Greenmount taxi service swung into action again, giving Rachel a lift to Bury.

Having another of those rare, fine days, I picked more ripe Blackberries, cut the back lawn and hoed the borders.

It turned out to be a long day, especially after we had collected Rachel from the tram station in Bury at 00:30 the following morning.

On Sunday 23rd September, we went into Ramsbottom to buy some materials from the craft shop for the Beavers, from which they would construct a Bat Mobile, that is a sort of dangly thing from which stars, bats and a moon hang and not a form of transport for a fictitious hero.

We called at the Fire Station to enquire about bringing the Beavers on a visit and ended up talking to a chap cutting his lawn across the road. He was one of the firemen, none of whom are on duty at the station on Saturdays or Sundays, so, presumably nothing in Ramsbottom is likely to catch fire at weekends. With the weather we've had this year, nothing much is likely to catch fire anywhere.

Rachel persuaded us to lunch at the Chocolate Café. We don't normally go there because it is fairly expensive, although the food and service are very good and Rachel loves chocolate.

On Monday 24th September, I was directed to produce cut-outs in the shape of flying bats from black card. The plan was for the Beavers (15 on Thursday and 12 on Friday) to make bat mobiles comprising two bats, two stars, made from silver card and one moon made from gold card. My job was to make the bulk of the 54 bats while Rachel would make the stars and moons. I must have been bats.

On Tuesday 25th September, I was even more bats.

On Wednesday 26th September, we had a change. We went into Ramsbottom for another pack of silver card for Rachel to make yet more stars. We picked up a few groceries from Morrisons and visited the fire station again, this time to drop off a letter formally requesting the Beaver visits and to undertake a risk assessment survey.

On returning home, we met up with Frank and Gwen and we all walked down to Summerseat Garden centre for lunch.

On the way, I took the opportunity to post a letter to JLT, the company who is managing the payment of my private pension which started when the NHS Data Centre, Prestwich, at which I was working, was privatised and bought by an American company, SMS. To say they are managing my pension is not strictly correct. Mismanaging would be more accurate.

JLT wrote to me some weeks ago to advise me my pension was payable and of the amount. This should have been paid from the 16th September and there was still no sign of it in my bank account. When I first asked JLT about it on 17th September, they said they were waiting for the Trustees to authorise payment and gave me the Trustee contact. That chap was not available when I first telephoned him and he failed to telephone me back. My second call to him revealed that he was dealing with it and he would try to resolve the matter that week. Since he hadn't, I sent JLT a letter of complaint and I have also contacted the Pensions Ombudsman.

On Thursday 27th September I was up earlier than of late to meet Frank and Steve for a short walk. Mike couldn't join us because he had a bad cold. We strolled the 3 or so miles down to Bury along the old railway line (aka Kirklees Trail), which brought us out at Tesco. Costa Coffee beckoned and while we were enjoying a refreshing break, the unscheduled, but not unsurprising, rains came. The rain cleared in time for our return journey, retracing our steps as far as the Bull's Head, for lunch.

I was back home for about 4 p.m. and back on the bat production line, completing my task just as Jenny and Rachel came back from the Beaver session at 7 p.m.

Friday 28th was another grocery shopping day at Unicorn and Bury Tesco, lunching at Costa Coffee in the latter and a brief excursion into the health store in Bury market. I wanted two bottles of the cranberry drink and, would you believe, there were two on the shelf waiting for me. Jenny wanted some Tom's toothpaste and they had that as well. What they didn't have was any of the Tom's mouthwash, which they have discontinued or any of the Buckwheat cereal, which was due for delivery the following Monday. Likewise the organic digestive biscuits. I also asked about Opies organic sweet pickle, which was a waste of time. It's getting really hard to get good quality food, even in specialist shops like this one, largely because there is not a huge demand. Most people seem to be happy to eat anything as long as it doesn't cost a lot. A bit like flies, really.

My late afternoon was spent cutting out three moons from gold card for the Beavers at 5 p.m., after which I managed to put my feet up for an hour or so before going to the SAS meeting at 7:15.

On Saturday 29th September, I was thinking about going round to the IE plot to offload some of the last bag of stones until the unscheduled rain started. Instead, I spent the day playing with my media in the comfort, warmth and safety of my own home. They can't touch you for it.

And so to the last day of another month. The grey morning was gainfully deployed delivering the latest version of the Greenmount Voice newsletter to the residents on our designated route, this being the first opportunity we have had to do so since we acquired our allotted bundle over a week previously.

The wet afternoon was split between more Beaver preparation work and meddling with my media, having completed the production of the second CD in as many days, except for the cover and label.

The first CD was a re-mastering of some recordings of Carrie singing various songs and what a great voice she has.

The second was a conversion of a Limited-Edition, 4-tape, box-set of the Big Band Era to CD. The task was made easier by the fact that one of the tapes, the best one, was missing and I didn't like many of the tracks on the other three.

All I needed to do was to find enough time to listen to the CDs to make sure they were alright.

Working through my media from A to Z, I'd reached the middle of the Bs. Which just about says it all.