

Greenmount – September 2014

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> September started well with Jenny and I unpacking the car from the previous day's car boot sale. While I stayed on trying to tidy up the garage in some small way, so that we could close the door, Jenny was multi-tasking again, swilling away some obnoxious deposit on the road behind the car and preparing Toffee's litter tray so that she could produce another urine sample (the cat, not Jenny).

I came in and took over the task of clearing away the mess on the road at the top of our driveway. I get all the good jobs.

It was then time to take the car up to Tottington Motors for Glenn to give it a road test to try to diagnose the cause of the whining of the fifth gear when in engine-breaking mode. The result of the investigation was that there didn't seem to be anything to whine about and, if the worst did occur, a gearbox overhaul (i.e. new gears) would cost about £700 (I was not sure whether this included the dreaded VAT or not) but it wasn't worth doing anything as drastic as that for the present. I was pleased that the road test didn't cost me anything.

Back home, I mixed some weed-killer and sprayed the persistent weeds on the block paving. I didn't like using weed killer, especially with the cats wandering about, but it was much easier than cleaning the block paving with a wire brush, taking the best part of a week and needing fine weather, every couple of months or so.

After lunch, we went down to Bury to deliver the cat's urine sample to the vet, collect some more thyroid tablets for her and collect Jenny's top and pyjamas she had ordered from British Home Stores. We then drove on to Ramsbottom to collect Jenny's new glasses and, of course, tour the charity shops, at least, the ones that were still open by the time we reached them.

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September was quite a fraught day. Our cat with the bald patch on her chest, Treacle, seemed fine. Toffee, on the other hand, was completely off her food and vomited quite violently three times, once outside on the lawn and twice on the dining room carpet, which I then had to clean up. I was getting good at this. In the afternoon, I was becoming quite concerned about her dehydration and inactivity and I made up a solution of Highland Spring bottled water, salt and sugar for her to drink to replace her body salts and electrolytes until I could take her to the vet.

Meanwhile, Edith went to the local chiropodist to find it closed, having a sign requesting people to telephone for an appointment and Jenny went to the hair salon, Cream, which was also closed. Jenny then popped into the chemist and was immediately approached by our friendly, local pharmacist, Keith, who gave her a label printer to bring home for me to repair. Their journey was not totally wasted, then.

I found two faults with the printer, the first being a broken ribbon cable and the second a broken label spool mount. I removed the faulty items and contacted the manufacturer to ask if there was any possibility of obtaining spares for the obsolete printer.

Jenny went to see Gwen about Gwen's car boot aspirations and she had no sooner returned than Lorna arrived for a chat. My social life of late had taken a bit of a dive, as opposed to being in a dive with Mike, Frank and Steve, who were, at this very time, spending four days walking the first part of the Cleveland Way north to south. Had I not been busy with visitors from foreign parts and planning our trip to New Zealand as well as dealing with two sick cats, I would have joined them.

On Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September Jenny and I took the cats to the vet.

The original appointment was for the bald patch on Treacle's chest and that was dealt with first. The vet suggested that it could have been caused by close contact with something hot, such as the exhaust pipe of a car. Both cats did tend to go underneath stationary cars, having the good sense not to go underneath moving ones and it seemed a feasible explanation for the cause of the aesthetically unpleasant affliction. An injection of antibiotics and the prescription of some anti-inflammatory liquid to be given once a day after or during meals was expected to sort it out. We were told we could continue to apply Aloe-Vera gel straight from our huge plant to the affected area and it would do no harm even if Treacle licked it off.

The examination of Toffee discovered that she had not lost any weight and she was not particularly dehydrated despite her stomach upset the previous day. It was decided to halt her thyroid tablets and substitute these with renal tablets. Together with a 2 Kg bag of biscuits, these were designed to manage her kidney problem. The thyroid tablets did have a tendency to raise her blood pressure and since her kidneys were struggling to cope with a normal supply of blood, the use of these, on reflection, may not have been such a good idea, particularly since her thyroid problem was not too significant. The vet did point out it was a question of balancing one with the other.

Balancing was something with which I was having difficulty after leaving minus one arm and one leg.

We hadn't been back home long before we were back on the road to Bury, this time by bus, giving our bus passes a long-deserved airing.

Jenny needed to visit the market health food shop and, afterwards, while making our way to Tesco (where else?), I received a call on my mobile telephone from our travel agent to say our tickets for New Zealand had arrived. We back tracked to collect them and subsequently found ourselves at Tesco.

Why we continue to frequent Tesco evades me completely. Searching for organic produce there is almost like looking for rocking-horse droppings. It's a great store for the less discerning amongst us, of which there appear to be many, although not as many as Tesco would like considering the store's recent fall in profits. That may have something to do with it not being particularly competitive.

In fairness, Tesco is not the only store that is near the bottom of my list, Asda, Aldi and Netto being three other stores that sprang to mind and there must be several others. The prices of food in these four stores might be more attractive but I maintain food is not about

cost, it's about quality. Our farmers and food industry, supported by successive governments of all parties, have been pumping us full of chemicals for the best part of the last century with who knows what adverse effects to our health.

Thank goodness for the few producers world-wide who believe in natural and organic food products and provide them in abundance for those of us who appreciate good and wholesome fare and who do not regard food as a means of generating wealth.

But I digress. After we left Tesco, we boarded the bus back home and, following a brief lunch, embarked on another jam-making session using our organically home-grown blackberries, organic sugar and Highland Spring, bottled water (filtered through organic land, no less). Just over a Kilo (2½ lbs for those of us who believe in GREAT Britain) of blackberries yielded five and a bit (a bit is another English measurement of great accuracy) jars of delicious jam.

Meanwhile, Amy had gone to Bury to meet Tor who was due back from her Spanish tour and they arrived home in time for tea.

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> September was spent at home tackling those important jobs requiring urgent attention.

My first task was to print some labels for the jam we had made the previous day. That was easier said than done since I had to create a new Word template for the new labels I had purchased from Asda.

Having spent what seemed like hours on such a trivial exercise (thank you Microsoft for making life so complicated), I turned my attention to the spare parts for our local pharmacist's label printer and obtained a quotation from the supplier.

Next I decided to fix the outside light on the patio. I had recently replaced the bulb in one of the three lamps, since which it had refused to illuminate. The electrical contacts needed cleaning. I thought it best to switch off the power to the light before commencing. Having completed the exercise, I switched on the power and all three lamps came on, together with all six under the car port, all wired to the same switch.

The electronic sensors at the back and front were supposed to turn off the lamps after about ten minutes and operate them only when people approached at night. At the front, this was not a problem. At the back, the lamps stayed on. Jenny eventually switched off the power again and I switched it back on when I went to bed on the basis that it didn't matter if the lamps stayed on all night. They were not on the following morning, so I could only conclude the sensors were working normally again. I only wished mine were.

After lunch, I commenced work on the electrical items from the Old School jumble that needed more attention than for which I had time prior to the last sale. Most of them needed plugs fitting and, having done so, they all worked when tested so I priced them and boxed them ready for the next sale.

My next task was to work out why the PDF I had exported from Open Office had dropped a hyphen from the middle of a web link (URL) contained with the text. I ended up filing a bug report with Open Office.

Then it was time for a beer, tea and a glass or two of wine. Fortunately, Amy and Tor, who went to Bury to meet Matthew and Carrie, did not require a lift.

I rounded off the evening with a brandy. The ladies did not require a lift home at 3 a.m. either, which is just as well.

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> September was another grocery shopping day and we set off rather early, at about 9:30, because Jenny needed to be back in time to go round to Beavers to hand over to Anne-Marie. I dropped off the quotation for the parts for the printer at the chemist on the way.

Before leaving, I had time to resolve a problem with Open Office Writer that had, seemingly, failed to preserve a hyphen in a web link (URL) in an exported PDF document. Having logged a fault with the Open Office bug reporting system, it turned out that the problem was due to the Microsoft Office 2003 Word application that had failed to preserve the hyphen in the URL when it created an RTF document (as opposed to the usual Word format [DOC] document) at my request. Microsoft was really doing well this month.

We were home for 3 p.m. and I updated the village and my web sites. That was another important task completed.

I went round to Beavers with Jenny to meet Anne-Marie and introduce her to the Beavers and their parents and we ended up staying for the whole session.

We were up at 5 a.m. on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> September because we had to take Tor to Manchester Airport to catch her flight to Singapore at about 9 a.m. We dropped Tor off outside the terminal 2 departure entrance for free (the significance of the “for free” will become clear later) and said our farewells on schedule, about 7 a.m., having left home a little later than planned and covered the journey in exactly 40 minutes despite the 50 m.p.h speed limit for most of the way. Why the M60 and M56 both had a 50 m.p.h speed limit with the hard-shoulder cordoned off was a complete mystery, as there was no sign of any activity to suggest why this was necessary. Perhaps it was the turn of these stretches of motorway to play host to the cones. Cones have to live somewhere, I supposed

From Manchester Airport, we made our way to Liverpool (John Lennon) Airport. I had painstakingly printed out the route from Google maps and Amy was navigating. As it turned out, that was totally unnecessary. The route was well signposted – until we arrived at the Airport. I was following the sign for Drop Off 2 when I spied a sign saying Express Drop Off. I made for that instead, dropped Amy off opposite the departure entrance, just like Manchester, which is much bigger and better, said our farewells and made for the exit. There was a £2 charge to get out, having been stationary for about ten minutes, about the same as at Manchester.

So, if the superior Manchester Airport can let drivers drop off passengers for free, why can't the grotty Liverpool Airport do the same, or, at least, make clear where this can and cannot

be done on their signs? Perhaps they need the money to pay royalties for using the name John Lennon?

When we arrived back home, Jenny and I went round to the Drop-in and I called in at the Chemist to see Keith about the printer. He made the executive decision to go ahead with the repair. Unlike Liverpool Airport, I didn't charge for my services and the only cost was that which I incurred for the parts.

I joined Jenny, who had paid a visit to Cream (hair salon) and we called in at Essencia (beauty salon). Apparently it's a woman thing.

I spent the rest of the day struggling with Jenny's laptop that was suffering from BSOD (the Blue Screen of Death). Windows 7 kept crashing. I decided to find out why and discovered I needed to install the Software Development Kit (or, at least, part of it) to analyse the memory dump Windows 7 had kindly produced.

That was easier said than done. The web link to the download for the SDK was wrong and I was redirected to another Microsoft web site with instructions that were about as clear as mud, so about par for Microsoft. I finally managed to download the SDK, which failed to install. Now there's a surprise.

I downloaded the SDK to my desktop as a DVD image and produced the DVD – eventually, as my desktop Sony DVD drive refused to recognise the blank DVD disc and I had to switch to using my Plextor drive.

Then Jenny's laptop refused to read the DVD I had produced. I thought the DVD might have been faulty, so I tried the laptop drive with Matthew and Carrie's wedding DVD, which we had not seen before and it wouldn't read that either, thinking it was a blank disc. I tried a commercial, pre-recorded CD and that played. I then hit on the idea of cleaning the DVD heads with my Fellows DVD Head Cleaner (the clue is in the title here) CD. Matthew and Carrie's wedding DVD then played alright and we watched it later that evening on the TV screen.

Meanwhile, I decided to dump the ISO SDK download onto a memory stick. If the DVD drive wouldn't read the DVD, I thought I'd load this onto a virtual DVD drive and try installing it from there.

While that was all going on, I decided to move my TV recording onto Rachel's laptop, having missed a recording I had scheduled for that afternoon. I uninstalled a previous Hauppauge WinTV 7 unsuccessful installation from Rachel's laptop, cleaned up the installation with hcwclear.exe from Hauppauge, rebooted the PC, downloaded the latest version of the installation from the Hauppauge web site and installed it. Did it work? No.

WinTV software would not recognise the hardware. I gave up on that and sent a rather curt summary of events to Hauppauge support. This wasn't the first time Hauppauge software hadn't installed properly.

Before installing the SDK on Jenny's laptop, I decided to try one last thing. I shut it down, disconnected everything including the power supply, removed the battery, held in the power-

on button for a minute, replaced the battery, plugged in the power lead and loaded up Windows 7. So far so good.

I connected up the Hauppauge tuner USB cable, checked it was working with Media Centre and plugged in the memory stick, containing the SDK DVD download as a warning to the damn thing that if it messed with me again....

It didn't and was fine overnight, managing to record a radio programme at midnight to which I wanted to listen.

As a result of all this messing about, we didn't get round to packing the car for the following day's car boot sale.

On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> September, I decided to check out Jenny's PC after undertaking a few chores for Jenny, not wishing to incur her wrath too much. The PC was fine and I managed to listen to the recorded radio programme, Geoffrey Smith's Jazz. I was still at it at lunchtime, by which time Jenny's sarcastic nature got the better of her once more. Two can play at that game, I thought and ignored her, finding yet more things to do on the computer just to wind her up even further.

The previous day's recording of Jazz Record Requests I had queued on my desktop, because I had another recording scheduled on Jenny's laptop at the same time (that's the one that didn't work because her laptop crashed), had started half way through. I had scheduled it using an old, obsolete piece of excellent software called Showshifter that no longer processes programme schedules, so recordings had to be inserted manually and I had set this one for the usual time, 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. The BBC had shifted the start to 4:30 p.m.

I resorted to listening to it from the BBC Radio 3 web site.

We spent Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September in the garage, tidying up in an attempt to make room for the car. How novel, I thought.

On Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September Christine called round, as arranged. She wanted me to show her how to process photographs from a CD. More specifically, she wanted prints of some of the photos and a copy of the CD.

I spent the rest of the day sorting out things on the computers.

On Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> September we were back in jam making mode and produced another 4½ jars of blackberry jam.

After lunch, we were back in the garage until tea-time.

We went grocery shopping on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> September this particular week because we had an engagement in Sheffield the following evening.

We called at the Old school to drop off some jumble and Jenny decided she was going to pop into the hair salon, Cream, so I took the opportunity to see Keith in the pharmacy to

tell him I had ordered the parts to repair his label printer. Jenny was back in the car before I was.

The next stop was at Holcombe Brook post office for Edith to send some calendars and postcards to NZ and this gave Jenny an opportunity to look for a birthday card for Karen, whose birthday would be coming up while we were away.

We finally set off on the road to Unicorn (it doesn't have the same sort of glamour attached to it as, for example, "The Road to Morocco"), lunched at Waitrose in Broadheath before gathering yet more goodies there and finishing off at Asda at Pilsworth, where Yellowtail Merlot and Chardonnay were both on offer at two for £10. That was too good an opportunity to miss.

Asda didn't have the Nouvelle recycled toilet rolls for which we had really called and we had to make do with the last two on the reels, one in each toilet.

Friday 12<sup>th</sup> September was much more exciting. I went out to tidy up the compost bin that was falling apart, the plastic sides having become dislodged at the corners where they snapped together, most probably as a result of me standing on it to cut back the ivy that was encroaching from next door's garden a week or two earlier. It was a dirty job but not as smelly as I had expected. Jenny said it smelled quite sweet. I knew I needed a shower.....

Anyway, I managed to offload several barrow-loads of well composed manure and spread it around the fruit bushes and repair the disfigured compost bin. Jenny helped me lift it back onto its base with the core of the compost still in situ and I shovelled the excess I had removed and which had not yet composted down back into the bin.

After lunch, it was time to shower and dress ready for the evening session in Sheffield. We didn't leave until late afternoon, which meant we hit a good deal of traffic and the bottleneck at Mottram, at the end of the M67. The result was that we didn't arrive at Anne and Wilf's (Jenny's brother's) house until turned 6:30 p.m., having observed some of the worst driving I had seen for some time on the M60 and the A628. Rebecca (Jenny's eldest sister's granddaughter) and Graham arrived at about 7:10 p.m. and we all set off for Le Bistro at Wentworth, where Reuben (Jenny's cousin) and Linda were already seated at the table.

We had a most enjoyable meal and we were the last to leave, taking Anne and Wilf back home and enjoying a late cup of tea before venturing into the darkness of the Woodhead pass once more. It was 2 a.m. before we fell into bed.

That brought us to the morning of Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September, which we did not really approach until about 10 a.m.

The first task of the day was to put all the TV recordings for the week into Jenny's laptop now that it seemed to be more stable than of late. Little did I know that the Blue Screen of Death was to reappear with a vengeance later in the day.

That done, we went for a stroll up Hollymount Lane to the orchard at Hollymount to scrounge a few apples for blackberry and apple pies, using the tail end of our blackberry

crop this year. We came back across the golf course and passed the time of day with a few golfers, the only sign of life we had seen, except for a couple of squirrels and a flock of sheep grazing in the valley, in the middle of this very pleasant day.

After lunch, we went into Ramsbottom for some Nouvelle recycled toilet rolls from Tesco, one of the few useful items they still stocked, except that they didn't. We settled for a small pack of their own brand recycled toilet rolls instead until we could find the better quality Nouvelle ones elsewhere.

I popped into the health shop for some Saw Palmetto tincture. They didn't have any in stock. I was beginning to think this wasn't my day.

We took the opportunity to do the tour of the charity shops and Jenny managed to find a DVD of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea for £1 in one of them. Our trip had been worthwhile after all. I had found a couple of DVDs I fancied but they seemed to be scratched, so I didn't risk purchasing them.

Back home, I caught up on some family tree work on one of those rare occasions when I can make time to do so these days.

Then it was time to pack the car for another car boot session.

After tea, we settled down to watch another episode of a Touch of Frost when Jenny's laptop crashed. Three more crashes later and I thought I was getting to the bottom of the problem. Time would tell, except that it was rapidly running out at 23:50 with the prospect of an early start at 5 a.m. for another day's car boot trading the following morning.

On Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September, we were up before the sun, which beats being up before the judge. Mind you, we were probably up before him as well. Another good day's car boot trading helped to stem the outflow of cash from my coffers, or it would have done if the takings found their way into the joint account. Instead, Jenny was squirreling them away into her camper-van account and she had about enough for all four wheels.

It was a long day and I did manage to make progress with Jenny's lap top later in the day, It looked like the problem was due to an old piece of software I use to de-mux (separate the sound from the video) digital radio broadcasts, which are recorded as though they were television broadcasts but without a video component. The offending piece of software was a Microsoft utility called Graphedit and an old one at that and a couple of associated Direct Show filters, LAME for encoding audio as an MP3 file and DUMP to write the resultant audio file to a disc location of my choice. I even tried using these utilities on my desktop to process the radio recording I had made on Jenny's laptop and that froze the software as well, so I suspected Microsoft had done something to change the format of the Windows Media Centre recordings. The investigation was ongoing.

We spent the morning of Monday 15<sup>th</sup> September unpacking the car from the previous day's exercise and tidying the garage.

After lunch, we drove Edith up to Barbara's bungalow in Redcar so they could spend a few days together before Edith returned to New Zealand. Jenny and I called at Turner's Mill in Redcar for a bit of tea and headed for home, having missed the village monthly meeting, which was held at the Old School at 8 p.m., for which I had earlier sent my apologies.

We walked up to the Dentist in the pleasant, warm sunshine on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> September. Jenny went in for a check-up and came out with a clean and polish. Jenny had a three-monthly appointment and this, being an intermediary visit, did not require my presence, although I enjoyed the walk. We dropped off a birthday card for June for the following day and came home for lunch, after which Jenny went to have her eye brows tweaked.

We rounded off the day with a trip to Bury, intending to call at the health food shop in the indoor market. The market, which is advertised as being open every day, was closed. To be fair, the advertisement did not say when, every day and my crystal ball had broken that morning.

We had to make do with Tesco.

I went to be another year older.

I awoke in the early hours of Wednesday morning, 17<sup>th</sup> September, with a very upset stomach and resorted to taking an extra 20mg of Losec at 5:30 a.m. That helped a little but I was awake with the discomfort for a couple of hours, after which I dozed for a little while before suffering from a severe attack of Montezuma's Revenge. It was a good job we had invested in a 9-roll pack of Nouvelle toilet tissue the previous day at Tesco.

After the lightest of breakfasts, involving only toast for me, we went with a group of people from Tottington District Civic Society on a visit to Hoghton Tower for a guided tour of the manor house and lunch. By lunchtime, I was feeling much better. It was a most entertaining and enjoyable day and the blue skies and warm sunshine made the amble round the gardens after lunch very pleasant. It was interesting to learn that the house, dating back to around 1100, had been frequented by many of the English royalty, Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare, not to mention us.

We arrived back home in the late afternoon and shortly afterwards, our neighbour, Sylvia, across the back, very kindly offered us two tickets to the evening's amateur performance of *The Ladykillers* at the Theatre Royal in Ramsbottom because she could not go. The first act of the play was well performed, well produced and funny. The second act, I thought, was a little less so, seeming to be somewhat rushed and suffering from a couple of unnecessary expletives not to be found in the Alec Guinness film version, which remains superb and unbeatable. Although unfair, it was difficult not to compare the play with the film and there were similarities, both in the script and the mannerisms of the players, which, I think, was to their credit. On the whole it was a very entertaining night out and I congratulate all those involved with the production.

I discovered that Montezuma had not quite finished with me on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> September. Maybe that had something to do with the cereal, very ripe and sweet mango and blueberries I had for breakfast.

While Jenny tackled some ironing, a frequent pastime of hers, I mowed the back and front lawns, a frequent pastime of mine. I was particularly pleased with my efforts on this occasion, having, during our garage-tidying exercise, found the spacers for the lawn mower and fitted them, lowering the blade and giving me a more thorough cut and shorter grass.

By the time I had tidied up, it was time for lunch and our trip up to Redcar, again, this time to collect Edith from Barbara's bungalow.

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> September was the usual shopping day at Unicorn and Waitrose. We left later than usual and traffic was bad. It was even worse coming back and Edith was a little late for her 4 p.m. hair appointment at Cream.

Jenny and I spent most of Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September in the garage, tidying up and preparing for the car boot sale the following day.

We were up bright and early, well, early, anyway, on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> September for yet another car boot sale in Ramsbottom. Trading was slow and steady, ending the day with a reasonable taking for our efforts, not that one could become rich from it.

My first task on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September was to take the printer back to our local pharmacist. The parts had arrived while we were on our way to Redcar the previous Thursday and had been taken in by Sylvia, our very good neighbour across the back. I had found time to fit them over the week end but I had no facility to test the printer, it being an old one, driven on a parallel port. As I arrived, there was a look of expectation on the faces of the staff, which I quickly dispelled with words of warning that, although I had fitted the parts, I could not guarantee success.

That turned out to be the kiss of death. When labels were sent to the printer, all it would do was to flash its three green lights at me three or four times every few seconds. Eventually admitting defeat, back home, I sent an E-mail to the manufacturer and received a very polite and speedy response the same afternoon to say that the flashing lights indicated a hardware error. That much I had deduced. Subsequent E-mail exchanges clarified the position. It was not possible to deduce which piece of hardware was faulty. I informed the pharmacist, Keith.

Jenny and I unpacked the car from the previous day's trading and tidied up the garage yet again, for the final time, creating, I hoped, enough space to garage the car and for me to get out of it once I had reversed it into the garage.

Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September was the first wet day for some time in more ways than one. I spent the morning scrubbing the kitchen and hall tiled floor, which must have use about eight buckets of hot water, half a bottle of Dettol (the kind that kills just about everything) and half a bar of the old-fashioned green soap.

After lunch, we spent the afternoon tidying up and cleaning the lounge and in the process, I gently expelled the largest house spider I had ever seen while Jenny kept a safe distance.

On Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> September, we took Toffee to see the vet, not that she was particularly enthusiastic about the whole thing. The usual ten-minute journey took about half an hour due to a large traffic jam stretching about a mile out from Bury centre. This, we later learnt, was due a road closure from Blackford Bridge to Asda at Pilsworth, another road closure on the other side of Bury and an accident somewhere on the M60. I thought it had been because a butterfly somewhere on the Amazon delta had flapped its wings. One lives and learns.

The result of the visit was another 90-days supply of tablets for the cat's kidneys and a bill in excess of £100. The strategy was to monitor the cat's weight and provided she did not lose any more, to see the vet again in December. If she did lose weight, she would definitely need another blood test to check the functioning of her thyroid.

After returning home, we went down to Bury to buy some clothes for our forthcoming trip. On the whole, I was successful, finding most of what I needed in Marks and Spencer, where quality still reigned, albeit at somewhat inflated prices. I managed to find a good quality T-shirt in Debenhams as well, reduced by 20%. Well done Debenhams.

We lunched at the excellent, expensive, Leckenbys before finally departing Bury for Asda at Pilsworth, forgetting that the road from Blackford Bridge was closed.

Nonetheless, we turned left up the road to the junction at which the road was closed and followed the diversion signs, expecting them to lead us to Pilsworth by an alternative route. Not a chance. The diversion took us on a scenic tour of the back lanes to bring us out on the A56 one junction further along from the one at which we had left it and then proceeded to direct us back towards Bury, passing that point and into Bury itself, along the road we had just travelled in the opposite direction. At this point, I gave up and came home.

“Could this be time for a beer?” I asked myself.

On Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> September we went into Ramsbottom for a few items and a potter round the charity shops where I found three CDs and a DVD. We came home for lunch and Doug came round in the afternoon to discuss the village web site handover.

As a treat for Toffee, we had bought her some cod from Morrison's in Ramsbottom. She wouldn't eat it. Now, if even a cat won't eat fish, what does that tell you about its quality? Needless to say we didn't have fish for tea.

We did not do our weekly, 40-mile shopping trip on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September. Instead we went to Bury to collect the remaining kidney tablets comprising Toffee's 3-month supply from the vet and to dump a small amount of rubbish at the Bury Recycling Transfer Station (tip).

We fought our way through the traffic to Asda at Pilsworth, the extra vehicular activity on the route we took being due to the closure of Croft Lane. We purchased a few essential supplies to tide us over the remaining few days before our departure to foreign parts, including some organic vegetables. Well done, Asda. The trip back was even more congested and I reflected that we should have taken the alternative route down Bass Lane, the infamous, single-track lane through Summerseat.

After lunch, I washed the car, ready for its two month internment.

On Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> September, Jenny and I went down to see Rachel in her Manchester flat while Edith, being tired from the previous day's excursion, remained at home.

I was tasked with hanging a few pictures, spraying a stubborn window frame with WD40 so that Rachel could open and close it easily, without falling out of her 6<sup>th</sup> floor flat and fitting two energy saving bulbs to the ceiling lights in the lounge/dining room.

On Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> September we went to the car boot sale in Ramsbottom, on this occasion as customers. My plan was to buy a wallet for my forthcoming holiday from the lady to whom I was chatting the previous week on the stall next to ours. She said she'd be there. Unfortunately, she wasn't.

We sped on up to Bleakholt Animal Sanctuary to deliver some cat food we no longer required and some shredded paper bedding for the animals and to visit their open day. I wish I had taken my camera. It was a nice day and it was very busy. Apart from wandering round the various stalls and seeing the resident animals, there was a farrier shoeing a horse with an infection in its hoof and he explained to me in some detail, using the x-rays, what the problem was and how he was trying to help the horse to recover by fitting special shoes. I also got to stroke one of the largest birds I have ever seen. And before you get too excited, it was a magnificent European Eagle Owl.

After a quick, late snack at home, it was time to prepare for tea with Matthew and Carrie at the Swan and Cemetery pub on Manchester Road. The pub had won quite a few awards for its food and our expectations were high. In practice it was a little disappointing and seemed to have gone the way of most establishments that win awards and become famous, overpriced and mediocre. Maybe had we chosen from the à la carte menu instead of choosing the roast dinner, it might have been better. We were not really impressed, though.

The day of departure arrived on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> September and we were up at 3:30 a.m. and ready for the taxi (formerly Tramcars of Tottington) by 4:45, expecting it at 5 a.m. Between 5 and 5:15, I watched the taxi pass the top of our road three times, looking for our house and I had to telephone the taxi service twice, first to find out where he was and second to say I had seen him and he was having difficulty finding us. When he did arrive, he was a very nice chap and I formed the opinion he was new to the job, especially when he nearly missed the exit from our crescent and was about to do another circular tour of the estate.

He took the clockwise M60 route to the airport, which I thought was a bit odd, since the quicker route, in my opinion, is the anticlockwise one. Still, we arrived in good time for the flight, over three hours early and joined the short queue at the check-in desk for our flight to Singapore, which didn't open for another twenty minutes or so. The very helpful lady from Singapore Airlines managed to arrange three seats together for us and we checked in our baggage and headed for security.

That's when the plan started to break up a little. We were stopped from taking any bottle containing over 100 ml of liquid in the hand luggage. We had to quickly consume two 250

ml bottles of water, so it was a good job I was thirsty. The third went down the sink in the loo. Further into the process, Jenny's bag of toiletries was found to contain a further half-dozen or so of offending items and she was given the option of binning them or checking the whole bag in as cargo. Guess who had to go back down to the check-in desk to do that. That exercise could have been more difficult that it was because, in all the excitement, I had taken Edith's boarding pass instead of my own. Once again, Singapore Airlines staff were very helpful.

Coming back through security, I was given a good frisking, unfortunately, by a big bloke. The first pass was bad enough, having to empty my camera case completely and take Jenny's laptop out of its bag. On this occasion, I had to empty my pockets and take off my shoes.

We finally made it to the departure lounge with a good hour to spare and the gate was not on the departure board for some time. When we finally did make our way to the gate, there was another long wait to board the plane.

From then on, for the next couple of hours at least, it was plane flying (as opposed to plain sailing). What we had not been told was that, when the plane landed in Munich, we had to disembark with all our hand luggage, wait at the gate and then re-board to our original seats. During this short stay on German soil, Jenny became quite thirsty and we couldn't find anywhere to purchase any water to drink, which was probably just as well, because we didn't have any Euros. I was impressed by the passenger facilities in Munich Airport, though. They seemed much better than Manchester.

The flight to Singapore was good but long and only Jenny had trouble sleeping, largely due to some very annoying and noisy German children in the seats in front of us and whose parents seemed oblivious to their existence. The service on the aircraft was second to none, one of the few standards of the time that appeared to have been maintained.

That brought us to 1<sup>st</sup> October and another episode in this, steamingly (well, we were in Singapore), never-ending saga.