

Greenmount – August 2010

The 1st August is worthy of note. It didn't rain. In fact, the sun actually shone in the afternoon, after Jenny and I had been out for a five mile stroll. We went to check the round-walk instructions for Greenmount, Hawkshaw, Two Brooks Valley and Bottoms Hall, originally documented in fourteen steps by the Scout Fellowship and now published on the Greenmount Village web site in forty. That's one walk done and seven to go.

On 2nd August, we had planned to visit Sheffield but since my exhaust system still seemed to be in need of a new tail pipe, not to mention a new set of baffles, I was more comfortable walking and standing than sitting. I checked the met office weather forecast for the area and, despite a few grey clouds, it said sunny periods, or so I thought. I missed the bit that said showers about 1 p.m. So, donning my waterproof jacket and deciding I didn't need my waterproof trousers, we set off on walk number two.

How wrong can you be? About fifteen minutes into the walk, through the trees of the Kirklees Valley, we felt a few spots of rain. A light, passing shower we thought. Wrong again, on the most grandiose scale possible. We carried on as the rain became heavier and managed to reach the halfway point as the rain now hitting the ground was bouncing back up several inches. With a dry top half and soaking legs, we squelched home by the most direct route. Naturally, as we drew near, the rain abated and within ten minutes of reaching home and donning dry clothes, it had stopped altogether. All I can say is that I hope my new pair of spectacles, for which I recently went for an eye test, improve my powers of observation.

On Tuesday 3rd August, Jenny had another trip to the Herbalist. Her general health has improved so much that he doesn't need to see her for another three months. He has continued her herbal medication and in return asked her what she takes to make her look so young.

On Thursday it was the cat's turn. They both had their annual check-up and booster injections. I asked for one but didn't get it. Both cats apparently have good teeth for their age and Toffee has lost about a kilogramme and is now almost at the correct weight, which is more than can be said for me. Treacle is, if anything slightly underweight, as is my bank balance after paying the vet.

On Saturday, I finally got round to attempting a repair on the Karcher pressure washer Matthew broke when I loaned it to him. Matthew did buy me a new one to replace the broken one but I don't like throwing things away and I thought I might be able to mend it. I not only identified the broken part but also managed to place an order for a replacement. That's the advantage of German-made products. *Vorsprung durch Technik*, as they say, if you can pronounce it.

On Sunday 8th August early morning rain prevented yet another car boot sale. We all went to see Matthew and Carrie so that Rachel could prepare herself for living at their house and looking after their cat, Penny, while they were on holiday in Cyprus (as in hot and dry as opposed to grey, wet and mouldy).

I did want to cut the grass on Monday 9th August but, after a promising start, heavy rain invoked plan B (remember plan B?)

First we took Jenny's bicycle to the shop where we bought it, for repair. One of the gear changers had broken and needed replacing. Being manufactured somewhere in south-east Asia and not Germany, the gear changer with integral brake was not repairable and was obsolete. Replace one and you need to replace both. We decided to have the bike overhauled, and a new pair of handle-bar grips and a lady's gel saddle fitted as well.

After that, we spent the day giving the lounge a good clean. Unfortunately, when I lit the fire in the evening, it blew back quite a bit of smoke into the lounge for some reason and it all needed doing again.

During this process, I discovered that the wood I cut up and placed in sacks has not dried out as planned. In fact, it seems to have attracted quite a bit of moisture and some of it is covered in a white, fibrous fungus. I had to take it out of the bags in the trailer, wearing suitable protective gloves and stack it under the car port at the front.

On Tuesday 10th we went to fetch our new glasses from the opticians. It might have cost twice as much as Specsavers but the personal service at The Spectacle Studio in Ramsbottom was excellent and a far cry from the conveyer-belt-like feeling at the former establishment. Not only that but I can now see more clearly and my glasses feel far more comfortable than for years. The new optician could not believe the difference between my old prescription and my more recent one and wanted to know what I had done with the white stick.

On returning, it was another cleaning day – this time the dining area, after making a batch of organic mushroom soup.

To say the rest of the week was wet is an understatement and the grass was so high I thought of throwing away the lawn mower and buying some sheep.

On Thursday 12th August, we received a telephone call to say Jenny's bike was ready and the cost was just over £90, over £15 more than we were expecting from our visit to the shop. This is getting nearly as expensive as running the car.

On Saturday 14th August we collected Jenny's bicycle, brought it home and then went grocery shopping in Bury for the few bits we could not find on the previous day's excursion to Unicorn in Chorlton and Tesco at Prestwich. Tesco in Bury was also a waste of time, so we headed up to Asda at Pilsworth, then to the Tesco Metro store on the way back home through Tottington and finally to the Co-operative store at Tottington. There seems to be a shortage of organic cream and we had to settle for the regular variety.

On arriving home, I completed online feedback forms for both Tesco and Asda telling them what I thought of their range of organic produce – or lack of it. I doubt it will make any difference but I felt better.

Mike and Lorna came for an evening meal of home-made coarse paté, leg of lamb roast and choice of sweet, most of which was organic, little thanks to Tesco and Asda.

On Sunday, I finally managed to cut the grass, back, front and side, on the first fine, warm day for about six weeks. Afterwards, we went down to see Rachel at Matthew's house. She was enjoying her independence and the cat was enjoying her company, especially at four in the morning, at which early hour the cat's enthusiasm was not reciprocated.

Monday 16th was another fine day. Wow, two in a row. And it was warm with temperatures in the low 20s. It was another day in the garden, trimming the edges, weeding, cutting back the ivy and sprucing up the pots on the patio. At the end of the afternoon, I was looking forward to a nice cold beer but didn't get one.

On Tuesday we went to Sheffield, leaving the grey drizzle of Lancashire for the sunny skies of Yorkshire. The sun always shines in Yorkshire. Well, nearly always.

I drove to the Meadowhall Interchange from which Jenny went to her niece's house and I caught the tram to town, using my free travel pass before this lunatic Government rescinds it. I spent a couple of hours in the Local Studies Library where I photographed seven years' worth of The Firparnian magazine, the annual publication of my old school, Firth Park Grammar, for the years I was there. I then walked down to the Archives, stopping to consume lunch in the warm sunshine on the way.

I managed to photograph copies of the marriage parish records for both my sisters and attempted to locate yet more traces of the early Dearden family in Ecclesfield.

By closing time, I had made little progress and walked back up to Fitzallan Square to catch the tram back to the Meadowhall Interchange. Once on the tram, I telephoned Jenny to let her know I was on the way and to come and collect me. Her mobile phone did not answer, so I left a message on her answering service.

A short while later, I received a call from Tracey's home telephone. It was Jenny asking me if I had left town. I told her I had left a message to that effect on her mobile phone and she then told me she had forgotten to bring it. She must have the only mobile telephone in the country that isn't mobile. I told her I would be at the Interchange in five minutes and she said she would come straight down to collect me.

I arrived at the Interchange and waited. Then I waited some more. I kept on waiting. About an hour later, I received call from a mobile number I did not recognise. There are no prizes for guessing who it was, although I might offer something if you can guess what her first words were. Then again, I might not. She told me she was lost. She was sitting in the car at the Sainsburys Petrol Station at the Meadowhall shopping centre (for those in Manchester, that's like the Trafford Centre, only better).

I found my way down to the Meadowhall from the Interchange and saw the Sainsburys Petrol station on the left. When I arrived there, I could not find Jenny or the car and I asked if there was another Sainsburys Petrol Station at Meadowhall. There is and it's on the opposite side of the huge complex. I asked for directions to it, enough food for five days and six bearers.

Fifteen minutes later, after walking the length of the Meadowhall shopping centre, I emerged into the car park outside Debenhams and headed for the road, which seemed miles away. These places are not designed for people on foot.

I eventually saw two Sainsburys Petrol Stations in the distance and headed for the nearest one as one heads for a watering hole in the desert. As I approached, I spotted the car and Jenny got out of the driver's door to meet me. Apparently, on returning to the Interchange, she had missed the turning into the Park and Ride car park, turned left up to the north end of the Tinsley Viaduct and then sped down to the south end and headed up Bawtry Road. She was obviously taking the scenic route.

As she realised she was going the wrong way and executing a three point turn, a very nice, young Asian lady came to her assistance. She sat in the passenger seat and directed her to the petrol station, lent her a mobile telephone on which to contact me and waited with her until I arrived.

We drove her home and thanked her. She would accept no reward, saying that this was her good deed for this day of Ramadan. We can't remember her name but we do thank her most sincerely.

We made our way to Ecclesfield where we stopped at the Meadow Farm pub for a meal, accompanied by some very badly behaved children a few tables away, before returning home.

I can well understand someone who is unfamiliar with the road layout around Meadowhall becoming confused. The road signs are unclear and the signing to the Interchange Park and Ride is virtually non-existent. It should be clearly signposted from both of the Tinsley Viaduct roundabouts but it isn't. Sheffield City Council please note.

After that escapade, trying to sort out the garage, garage loft and Jenny's car boot stock on Wednesday was an anti-climax. This spilled over to Thursday, after Jenny had been out for lunch with a friend, leaving me to empty the dishwasher, hang out the washing on the Dearden line and empty the recycling bins we keep in the kitchen. Just call me Nutty Slack (Cinders is a girl's name). You know what they say, Nutty but nice!

On Sunday 22nd, we decided to take a car boot slot at Ramsbottom and rose at 5:30 to a fine morning with some cloud. The forecast was for a dry day with sunny periods and temperatures of 18 degrees (that's above freezing). To say the met office is a waste of public funds is like saying you need a pair of wellies to cross the Atlantic on foot.

We set up the stall and trade, as usual, started to pick up about 10 a.m. By 11 a.m., the landlords had been round for the £11 pitch fee. Minutes later, the first shower arrived and everything got slightly damp. We rammed most of the stock in the car boot until the shower subsided, the rest being sheltered under the tree, in front of which we had parked. We set up the stall again. Within the next half hour, trade was improving as

the second shower arrived, heavier than the first. This time, everything was soaked. We packed up and came home, having made a small profit on the day.

In future, we shall have to get up earlier to check the weather on the day by strolling down to the local farm and checking what the animals are doing. A whole herd of cows lying down or sheep gathering together by a hedge is a sign of bad weather. Cattle scattered and grazing in a field is a sure sign of good weather. This is a damn site more reliable than the met office and it's free.

On Monday 23rd, I was thinking of taking my sore bum to see the doctor but since there were no appointments available until 1st September on the surgery's web page, they rarely answer the telephone, if it isn't engaged for hours on end and it was raining too hard to venture out, I decided not to bother. Instead, I reached for the Germoloid cream, not that I normally need it, on the basis that I hadn't tried this approach on this occasion. There was a good deal of immediate relief and two days on suggested matters were improving slightly. At least I was able to sit down and type this.

Nonetheless, I telephoned the surgery and asked if I could have an appointment with one of the two doctors I normally see. One was on holiday and the other was not in. Neither were there any free appointments the following day. I told the receptionist I would probably go down to A&E at the local hospital, whereupon there was a brief pause and then she said she had found a cancellation at 3:30 p.m. the following day.

Now, by a strange coincidence, Carrie's mum had telephoned the surgery for an appointment a few days previously and been offered a cancellation at 3:30 p.m. the following day. Mmmm!

Surprisingly, there was only one other person in the waiting room when I arrived and during my brief wait, only one other person arrived and went in to see a GP. This is not my normal experience of a well-booked surgery and I can only conclude that the Practice Manager is doing an excellent job of managing the GPs' time. Of course, if I had a suspicious mind....

I could tell my GP had missed me because his first words were "We haven't seen you for some time." I have to say he is a really nice chap and a very good GP. He listened to my symptoms and then had the dubious pleasure of carrying out an examination on my nether regions. I am pleased to say that he could find nothing seriously wrong and could not understand what was causing my discomfort. He suggested I give it another few weeks and if the problem persists, he will arrange for me to see somebody with a proctoscope. If you don't know what that is, you're probably better living in ignorance.

After that, things seemed to improve somewhat. It's not surprising, really.

On Saturday 28th, Jenny's brother and his wife, Anne came to stay for the long week end and we collected them from the Tram station in Bury. The interchange is undergoing some face-lift operation and the whole drop-off and pick-up area is chaotic, more so than usual.

On Sunday 29th August we had planned to go to the China Cottage in Ramsbottom at 7:30 for a meal. Treacle, one of our cats, had not been well since mid-morning and by tea time, she was having great difficulty swallowing and coughing up foam. I thought this didn't look too good so I telephoned the vet. The office had been open from 2 to 4 p.m. but was, by then, closed and I obtained a number for an emergency vet from the answering machine.

I called Pet Medics and was advised to take the cat straight to their 24 x 7, purpose-built animal hospital in Worsley. I was also advised that the fee was £78 before any treatment. I like their sense of priority.

One forty minute drive and a one hour wait got us into the consulting room with a very nice vet who said he thought Treacle had something stuck under her soft palette. I told her she couldn't paint. He said he would have to remove it under sedation and suggested we leave her and contact them after 9:30 p.m.

We left, minus one cat, only to be chased out of the door by a receptionist shouting after us that she wanted some money before we drove off. I said I thought we paid for the treatment when it was complete. Apparently not. This is a pay-as-you-go service. I told her I was in a hurry because we were going out and she did her best to speed things along but the vet had not updated the computer record and she didn't know how much to charge me. She asked if she could take a payment of £150 and I handed over my credit card, as you do.

It was not until we were mobile that Jenny looked at the receipt and asked me who the chap was whose details were at the top of the document. I said they were mine. She said they weren't. I said "Oh dear", or words to that effect.

Another forty minute drive and I was back home on the telephone to the animal hospital. Apparently, I had paid for someone else's animal's treatment. I was assured they would resolve the matter.

A quick wash and change and another ten minute drive found us in the restaurant for about 8 p.m. We enjoyed an excellent meal and I enjoyed my one and only Tsing Tao beer, having to drive.

We were back home for 10:30 and I telephoned the animal hospital. I was told I could collect Treacle after 11. They also told me they owed me £30. That's the kind of priority I like.

We were back in Worsley for just after 11 p.m. Our route took us through Swinton and past the new police station, surrounded by a high, unscalable fence, which just about says it all. The animal hospital is tucked away in a purpose-built facility at the remote end of a large, poorly-lit business park and, quite wisely, the doors were locked and controlled by an entry intercom.

We spoke to the vet, who showed us a fine slither of pampas grass, obviously from the plant at the front of our house, which he had removed from Treacle's throat. She was alright but had a very sore throat and was still very wobbly from the anaesthetic, as I should have been from beer.

The receptionist told me she was not authorised to issue me with the refund and I would have to telephone the hospital the following day.

Treacle was relieved to be home but had difficulty standing up. I can sympathise.

I did get my refund when I telephoned the hospital the following morning.

Anne and Wilf departed on the 31st after lunching in the sunshine on the patio and after enjoying a sunny week end here in Greenmount.

We settled down to a week of fine weather for a change and back into the routine, the autumn school term starting on the 1st September and Jenny back at work.