

Greenmount – August 2015

On 1st August, being the first Saturday of the month, it was the village Drop-in and Jenny and I went round for a chat and a browse round the various stalls.

After lunch, I decided to start tidying up and I spent a good while consigning the pile of rubbish in and on my desk in the conservatory to its appropriate storage facility. Not only that but I cleaned and vacuumed two-thirds of my desk before giving up for the day.

I resumed my previous day's labours on Sunday 2nd August, the weather forecast not being favourable for a car boot sale yet again. I completed the cleaning of my desk and generally cleaned and tidied the rest of the half of the conservatory nearest the house, much of the other half being occupied by car boot stock, to be re-housed in the garage when we had made room for it.

My chores were interrupted by a call for help from my sister, Barbara, who was having difficulty downloading the Globe and Mail crossword to her Windows Vista desktop computer in order to print it. She was able to download it to her Windows 8.1 laptop but that was not attached to a printer and she wanted to know how to transfer it to the desktop in order to print it.

I made the mistake of suggesting she print it across the network to her desktop printer from the laptop. Network printing was not configured on her laptop.

I talked her through configuring network printing using Microsoft's recommended procedure. I should have known better. Microsoft, as usual, was about as much help as rain to car boot traders. While the 8.1 laptop could detect the printer on the Vista desktop, Windows Update could not find the drivers to install. That was exactly the same problem I had in sharing my XP printer with my Windows 7 laptop.

To make matters worse, manually configuring the printer in Windows 8 was far more difficult than in Windows 7 and I could well understand the rush to move everyone to Windows 10, and the large proportion of updates being free to Windows 7 and 8 users. I couldn't help wondering what had happened to Windows 9 but if the downhill spiral of ease of use and reliability since XP to 8 was any indication, it is probably as well that it never saw the light of day. As for Windows 10....

Three hours it took to get the damn thing to work and I was thinking of billing Microsoft for my time. Windows 8 was supposed to be more user-friendly, was it? Even the technical advice on the MS website was wrong and misleading. Whatever happened to ISO 9000 or the ANSI equivalent?

The weather forecast for Monday 3rd August was for an overcast but fine day so I decided to cut the grass on the side garden, which the council chaps had left alone and which I had not been able to tend to because of the wet weather. This was my opportunity, a fine day in the middle of the monsoon season.

I was almost finished when there were a few spots of heavy rain. The clouds might have gathered but the air turned blue. I was about as annoyed as one can get with an intangible deity. Fortunately, my anger must have been detected because the rain didn't amount to anything and I managed to finish cutting and strimming the side before lunch. I even had

time to clear most of the long grass I do not normally cut along the side of the fence. The council chap had been and cut it down using a heavy-duty strimmer, leaving the ground strewn with what might have been mistaken for hay. I couldn't finish it because I had filled our bin, which, fortunately, was due to be emptied the following day.

After lunch, we started work on sorting out the garage. It was now used as a store room, mostly for Jenny's car boot stock. It was beginning to look like I would have to store my logs for the stove outside under the car port.

We still had not moved all the excess items from the conservatory and we decided that was a job for the following day, except it wasn't.

On Tuesday 4th August, I spent the day on foreign territory - in the kitchen. It was time to clean the cooker. My role was to cut out and fit new aluminium foil to replace the old, dirty foil in the trays on the hob to protect the surfaces from spills and such. The last time we (or rather I) did this was in December last year.

That three hours took us to lunch and, after a brief rest, it was time to scrub (as in hands and knees with a scrubbing brush) the kitchen and hall floors. Five buckets of water later and another three hours took us to tea time and a welcome glass of red wine.

Wednesday 5th August was not a good day at all. I awoke feeling very sick and ended up back in bed where I slept until 2 p.m. I had intended visiting B&Q again to purchase the items I needed for finishing off Jenny's raised beds and to complete them. Best laid plans and all that.

We spent Thursday 6th August generally tidying up, cleaning and polishing, with particular emphasis on the lounge.

The usual shopping trip on Friday 7th August took all day, with an initial visit to the refuse collection point in Bury to drop off some rubbish and a brief detour to Matthew's house, where we met up with Carrie, Matthew being at work, to return some items. We finally arrived at Unicorn at about 11 a.m. and timed our arrival at Waitrose at the peak of the lunch hour. I ordered a bacon roll and asked if I could have a side salad with it. I had never had a side salad with it before and I discovered why not. The lady told me that side salad was only available with paninis. I must have looked really disappointed because when she brought over my bacon roll, there was the side salad. I thanked her and said I would happily pay extra for it and she told me I was welcome to it as a special treat. Very kind, I thought.

Our return journey took us for a brief visit to Asda with the intention of buying some wine. Unfortunately, yellow Tail had returned to its usual price of nearly £7 a bottle so we declined. I did purchase a bottle of Armagnac as I found it helped my bad nasal congestion and chesty cough. Well, that was my excuse, anyway.

Saturday 8th August was an eventful day. I started the day, as one does, cleaning out the fire from the last time we lit it, a few weeks ago. That task was interrupted by Jenny requiring assistance to pick the raspberries and while I was in the bushes, I thought I might as well harvest the rest of the blackcurrants as well.

I finished off the fire and then moved the bulk of the boxes of equipment I was going

to repair from the conservatory into the garage.

After lunch, Rachel arrived and wanted to wash her car, coming here because I had all the necessary items. I helped her unwind the hose and feed it through the garage and I prepared the bucket of hot, soapy solution, carrying it round to the front for her, thus avoiding the risk of spillage on the kitchen floor. Her invoice was to follow later.

Jenny and I left Rachel to her task as we went upstairs to wash down the window wall in our bedroom with sugar soap solution and then rinse it off with cold water. The reason for this particular activity was that Jenny had refused to put up the curtains she had washed because the wall was quite dirty. How it became so dirty is a mystery to us both.

After that, I helped Jenny put up the curtains to give the vertical blinds some company and us a little more privacy, not that we were overlooked or that the vertical blinds did not.

Jenny decided to clean behind the dressing table we had moved and after she had vacuumed the carpet, I helped put it back in place in front of the window.

The next item on the agenda was to cut and trim the front and back gardens, in that order.

While I was at it, the block paving needed weeding and I started on the drive, doing battle with a nest of ants on the top, right-hand corner. They were not best pleased and I had to make sure I did not bring any of them into the house afterwards.

I had to give that up after about half an hour because both my wire brush and I were worn out. It was just as well as Jenny needed some help to turn the raspberries we had picked earlier and some we had picked over the past few days and had kept in the freezer, into jam. We made another five jars.

By 7:30, after having started the day roughly twelve hours earlier, it was time for tea and a beer.

Now that's what I call a productive day.

The parents of Rachel's Matthew, Clive and Lorraine, arrived with Rachel and Matthew at about 11 a.m. on Sunday 9th August and we went for a walk up Holcombe Hill. On the way, we met Lesley Hopkinson with whom I used to work at Prestwich. She looked very well and was taking part in a belly-dance session at the base of the Peel Tower on top of Holcombe Hill in aid of Cancer Support. Clive and I went up the tower, although the overcast sky obscured the view somewhat and we were not sure whether we could make out Mount Snowdon.

We continued our journey, intending to cut down through Buckden Wood to Stubbins and back into Ramsbottom and then home through the park and by the River Irwell. Unfortunately, time was running short and we took a shortcut into Ramsbottom. After a brief stop at the Farmers' Market, we came back along the main road.

A quick change and fifteen minutes later, we arrived for a very good meal at the Swann and Cemetary on Manchester Road about ten minutes late, our excuse being that we had

been looking for somewhere to park as their small car park was full. We parked on the road opposite, leading to the cemetery.

Rachel, Matthew, Clive and Lorraine came back to Greenmount briefly for Rachel to collect a few belongings and then they left for Manchester.

We settled down for a rest.

I woke early on Monday 10th August with my cough and catarrh, which I still had not managed to shrug off, although I was fine walking up Holcombe Hill the previous day, not even stopping once for a rest and climbing the stairs up Peel Tower with only one brief pause to catch my breath. It was beginning to look like I had developed some sort of allergy to something in the house, possibly the cat?

We were up at 7 a.m. and had breakfasted by 8 a.m. Mike called at the door as he was passing, walking his son's dog, for a brief chat because we hadn't seen him for a while. It was obvious the weather forecast had changed because it was raining quite fast and the rest of the day delivered weather from just about all four seasons of the year. I blame Shell (see <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/climate/arctic>).

We spent the morning picking through and topping and tailing the blackcurrants we had picked over the past few days and which had been stored in the fridge. We ended up with a little short of 3 lbs so we decided to go out in one of the dryer moments to see if we could find any more left on the bushes. We ended up with 3¼ lbs which, after lunch, we turned into 9 jars of jam. That was just about another day gone.

I settled down to listen to a recording of this week's Geoffrey Smith's Jazz, which featured a profile of Henry "Red" Allen, a trumpet player, in my opinion, ranking a good second to the man himself, Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong. Jenny settled down to make some scones and cook tea. The scones were a special treat on which we were going to try our first ever organically home-grown and organically home-made raspberry jam.

We went into Ramsbottom for a tour of the charity shops on Tuesday 11th August and found series 5 of A Touch of Frost on DVD. I drove on through to Rawtenstall to buy some hard-wearing, high-gloss, floor varnish from Kings, where we buy most of our quality paint. The varnish was for the floor of the shed in the church grounds.

After lunch at home, I went to the shed, hand-sanded the floor to remove much of the foot-fall dirt, created when erecting the shed and applied a coat of the varnish.

The plan was to return to the shed and give the floor a second coat of varnish on Wednesday 12th August. Instead we instigated good, old plan B.

We went down to B&Q at Heap Bridge in Bury for some screws and, as it turned out, a substitute for Visqueen since they didn't stock the proper stuff. We detoured to Tesco, as one does, on the return journey.

After lunch and a quick rest to digest it, Jenny helped me to assemble the bench for the raised beds on the patio, putting the morning's purchase of screws to good use. It was about 6 p.m. by the time we had finished, leaving us no time to deploy the protective plastic sheet we had bought. That and actually constructing the raised beds themselves

was a job for the following day. Oh, joy!

And so it was. On Thursday 13th August, we laid out the plastic sheeting on the drive, measured it and cut it to produce a piece to cover the bench, neatly stapled in place using the staple gun I had acquired from Tracey at the Incredible Edible plot.

We assembled the raised beds, placed them on the bench, cut more pieces of plastic sheet to line the beds and stapled that in place as well. Has anyone spotted the deliberate mistake in this development yet? Read on.

We had fitted lunch in there somewhere and after I had finished the raised beds, I went off to give the shed floor another coat of varnish, which took me up to tea time, followed by the usual evening of relaxation.

My chesty cough and nasal congestion was no better. In fact, it seemed to be much worse and I didn't sleep well. On Friday 14th August, Jenny suggested it was time to see the doctor and I tended to agree with her. Grocery shopping got in the way of making the necessary arrangements and it seemed to take up most of the day. Friday was a very wet day and we came back to raised beds with an inch of water in the bottom. The plastic lining had no drain holes!

It was almost a couple of weeks since I had updated the village web site and I tackled that on the morning of Saturday 15th August, having promised to insert something on the previous day for one of our residents. I was still feeling rough and resolved to telephone the doctor on Monday. After lunch, I helped Jenny pack the car for the following day's car boot sale, the weather forecast being most favourable. That was not particularly encouraging since it was supposed to be fine with sunny periods today and it was cloudy and wet.

Nonetheless, we were up at 5 a.m. on Sunday 16th August to clear skies and, once the sun had risen, a fine sunny morning. We had a reasonable day's trading and I was beginning to feel a little better. The red wine and beef stroganoff for tea helped.

I awoke feeling much more relaxed on Monday 17th August, my cough putting in the briefest of appearances and, for the first time for weeks, I was actually able to breathe easily, breathing being a somewhat advantageous pastime.

After helping Jenny pick the ripe fruit, harvest the first batch of potatoes she had been growing and set up her table on the drive to unpack the car and sort through her car boot stock, I started cutting the grass. The chap from the council had been round earlier and, fortunately, he had not touched the bit of common land I cut on the side of the house for the third or fourth time. The message that I do a better job seemed to have filtered through.

I didn't get very far because I had to take a break. I obviously was not as well as I thought I was, whatever infection I had still very much playing havoc with my interior bits. We broke for lunch and a rest.

After that, I finished the side garden and cut the grass on both the front and back gardens, helped Jenny tidy up, cleaned the mower and put away all my bits and pieces. I was quite tired and decided to leave the strimming and trimming, edges and hedges and

weeding and feeding until the following day, conscious of a session at the Incredible Edible plot and that the shed floor that could do with a third coat of varnish.

I was not at all well on Tuesday 18th August, my chesty cough plaguing me again and the previous day's activity was taking its toll. I was certainly functioning well below par.

We rose quite late and it was fortunate I was not expected to be at the Incredible Edible plot until about 1 p.m. I decided to go a little earlier with the intention of giving the floor of the shed another coat of varnish before meeting up with the rest of the team. On arriving, Tracey and Donna were at the shed and we chatted for about twenty minutes. The ladies took their leave, this being a survey meeting to discuss strategy rather than a working party.

While varnishing the shed floor, Frank arrived and we talked about developments. Frank had expected to meet up with Donna and Tracey at 1 p.m. I finished off and we left the shed floor to dry.

By this time I was feeling even worse and decided to telephone the doctor for an appointment. The next available slot was in a week's time, although when I explained I had been struggling with my cough for about six weeks, they managed to squeeze me in at 3:50 in the afternoon.

After discussing my symptoms with the young lady, she was taking no chances. I was given a prescription for a nasal spray to sooth my inflamed tissue and extra Omeprazole to double my dose for a couple of weeks in case the problem stemmed from the excess reflux of stomach acid due to my hiatus hernia, as has happened once or twice before. I was asked to book an appointment for a second blood-pressure check, blood tests and an ECG in case the problem was heart related, my blood pressure at the time being slightly elevated. I was given a card for a chest X-ray at the local hospital to check out my lungs. I was also told my ears were full of wax and needed treating with olive oil. It was all very thorough and came away with a sense of progress. At least my CPU was still functioning.

Interestingly, I was not offered any antibiotics, which I knew would only work if the infection was bacterial anyway, viral infections being unmoved by them. This did not overly concern me because I didn't like taking antibiotics anyway, preferring to rely on natural substances like garlic, ginger, celery, broccoli, blueberries and so on, all of which have properties that help fight and prevent infection.

It was the cat's turn on Wednesday 19th August and we arrived at the vet's practice, on time for a change, at 9:30. The vet gave Toffee a most thorough examination and was impressed how well Toffee seemed to be given her age. I told her that was probably because she slept most of the time and on our bed at night. She gave her the booster vaccinations and clipped her claws.

After lunch, we went to the hospital for my chest X-ray. We arrived just as the fire alarm had sounded and had to wait outside, sheltering from the rain under the main entrance canopy, for about 15 minutes. Not that there was any sign of the fire service.

I eventually had my chest X-ray using the latest technology and digital imaging. I was told the results usually take about a week to reach my GP, but, of late, they had been arriving within a couple of days, so I might have some news by the end of the week. I wasn't

holding my breath. Holding my breath in my condition wasn't easy.

On Thursday 20th August I came downstairs to a desktop PC that was constantly trying to load itself and failing miserably. I knew how it must have felt. My first reaction was "Oh no, not again" and I switched it off at the main power switch on the case, sat down and thought about it. The last time it did this, it was down to a faulty power switch on the front of the box and I replaced that with the button used to restart the box, resulting in no restart button, which didn't really matter.

I disconnected the computer, removed enough of the casing and components to be able to access the power button and connection to the motherboard and removed it. I went online to search for a replacement and found a decent one on Amazon for about £5 including delivery. I decided to try the local PC shop, first, the following day when we went grocery shopping.

After lunch, we thought it might be a good idea to commence work on the electrical jumble at The Old School, the sale being on the coming Monday. The room in which we usually worked was having the floor varnished, so we had to work in the kitchen. I'm not sure what Health and Safety would have said about that since much of the electrical jumble we received was not exactly in the cleanest of conditions.

We went shopping as usual on Friday 21st August, heading off in the opposite direction, towards Ramsbottom, to call at the PC shop on Bolton Road West to see if they had a PC power switch for my desktop computer. The chap there did not have one as such but he did have an old tower system case complete with various wires and he asked me if I wanted it. My first reaction was I didn't, I just wanted the switch but seeing that it would take a little time and effort to dismantle, I said I would take it and do it myself, asking him how much he wanted for it. He told me I could have it for free; he had lots of them and needed to dispose of them and I was welcome to it. Being a Yorkshireman, I couldn't refuse.

The journey down to Unicorn and that back from Waitrose were both a bit of a trial. The majority of drivers simply have no idea how to drive on a very busy motorway and, if I had my way, I would take their licences off them. It was stop and start much of the time in both directions, although I usually manage to keep moving by maintaining a decent distance between my vehicle and the one in front such that if the other driver stops, I can slow down using my gears and keep going, however slowly. The majority of other drivers seem not to have the intelligence or patience to leave gaps between vehicles with several disadvantages. First, it gives other vehicles no room for manoeuvre if they wish to change lanes. Second, it gives those joining the motorway no opportunity to slot in. Thirdly, if the driver in front stops suddenly, there is absolutely no chance of stopping before bumping into the vehicle, creating, at best, a concertina shunt and, at worst, a catastrophic accident involving loss of life and the closure of the motorway. A gap of at least two bus lengths is advisable at all times. Experiments have shown that, on a busy motorway, constantly changing lanes to try to gain the best advantage and driving as close as possible to the vehicle in front makes no significant difference to journey time, so why take the risk?

We returned too late to go to the Old School to sort, test and price the electrical jumble and I spent about half an hour fixing my desktop PC using the spare part from the earlier acquired junk from the PC shop, ending the day on a successful note.

We made an early start with the electrical items for the jumble sale on Saturday 22nd August and put in a full day. We finished off by packing the car for the car boot sale the following day, temporarily dumping the rubbish from the jumble items on the drive. I doubt that impressed the neighbours.

We made an even earlier start at the car boot sale on Sunday 23rd August, being at our pitch about 6:45 and arriving home about 4 p.m., too tired to do much else. We found enough energy to empty the car, store away all the car boot stock and put the jumble rubbish back in the car.

We were back at the Old School on Monday 24th August for another full day, coming home after the sale at 6:30, by which time Rachel had arrived with Matthew, having collected Jenny's brother, Wilf and his wife, Anne, from Piccadilly railway station. After a quick wash and change, we made for the Bull's Head Toby Carvery for tea and that was followed by a most enjoyable quiz night where our team, 'The Heavy Thinkers', came second after a tie-break question.

On Tuesday 25th August, we took Anne and Wilf to Bygone Times at Ecclestone for a potter round the large display of antiques, collectables and more modern items. We were back just in time to join Rachel and Matthew and Matthew and Carrie at the Swann and Cemetery for tea.

The food was very good. The service, on the other hand, was not.

First, Jenny and Rachel both ordered the gluten-free Paté. When Jenny's Paté arrived, she questioned whether the bread was gluten-free or not and the waitress said it was not. She took it back and subsequently served up two dishes that were gluten-free. Now, while Jenny and Rachel are not celiac, had they been so and eaten the bread that was served up without question, it could have had serious, if not life-threatening, consequences. The seriousness of this mistake should not be understated and could have resulted in criminal charges being brought.

Second, Anne ordered a curry with rice. It came with half rice and half chips. Anne did not wish to raise the matter.

Third, I ordered my steak with a peppercorn sauce. It arrived without the sauce and I had forgotten I had ordered it until I had nearly finished my meal. It wasn't missed from the bill though and when I told the waitress, she told me she hadn't forgotten it. It must have been the kitchen staff who forgot to serve it up.

Fourth, Anne ordered pistachio ice cream for a dessert. The waitress came back to say there was none and Anne declined an alternative. That, too, was added to the bill, something I did not spot until I examined the bill more closely when we returned home.

The highlight of the evening was when I went to settle the bill and two attempts to do so with each of my bank's debit and credit cards were all declined. My Matthew stepped in and paid the bill for me and I said I would reimburse him.

At home, I telephoned my bank. A chap at their fraud department told me the bank's transaction processing system had blocked the payments because the bank had the Swann and Cemetery listed as a pub and nightclub, it had a history of fraudulent

transactions and my bill for eight was somewhat high for that type of premises.

Now the last two times I had eaten at the Swann and Cemetery, everything had been fine and I can only assume that the problems with the meal and the billing that occurred on this occasion were unusual and I stress that the food was excellent. Maybe some better staff training might be in order and maybe the restaurant needed more waitresses for the size of the dining room.

As regards the issue of payment, I suggest that the owner of the Swann and Cemetery should speak urgently with my bank. Then again, I thought perhaps I should change my bank.

On Wednesday 26th August, Rachel arrived early for breakfast after dropping her car off at Tottington Motors for its MOT. I gave Rachel a lift to work in Bury and came back to take Jenny, Anne and Wilf on a tour of Ramsbottom. After that, I dropped my party at Summerseat Garden Centre while I went into taxi mode, collecting Rachel from Bury and taking her to collect her car from the garage. I proceeded to join Jenny, Wilf and Anne for lunch at the garden centre.

After lunch, I brought everyone home, briefly, before running Anne and Wilf to Piccadilly Station to catch their train home to Sheffield. Parking at the station was difficult and I had to reverse the car quite suddenly to avoid an impatient bus driver who was doing his best to use his vehicle to redesign the front of my car, not realising that Jenny was stood immediately behind it. Fortunately, Anne pulled her out of the way and she was not injured.

Jenny and I decided to go on to the Trafford Centre to buy a present for (Rachel's) Matthew's birthday on the coming Saturday. I briefly took the wrong turning again at the White City Circle, road signs being few and far between. We finally made it and found both a suitable present and a nice card in John Lewis.

The journey back on the M60 was nothing but horrendous, discovering that it was down to one lane where the M61 joined the M60 clockwise. We couldn't have averaged more than 5 m.p.h. for the journey from the Trafford Centre to that point and it took us over an hour and a half to reach home, a journey that would normally take about thirty-five minutes.

Rachel joined us for tea to end the very long and tiring day and she was able to collect the present and card for Matthew.

We had a lie-in on Thursday 27th August, not rising until about 9:30. After breakfast, I cut the grass on the side garden and finished it off by strimming and trimming, including the ivy on the garage wall, after lunch. The front garden received the same treatment and I started clearing the unsightly growth in the block paving on the front path. I managed about half of it when Jenny came out indicating it was time to think about packing up for tea. Jenny cleared up at the front for me while I cut the grass on the back garden and I cleaned and put away the lawn mower and the strimmer.

I came in, washed my hands and sat down to a nice cool Perri (a cider made with pears instead of apples), not having had one for some time. It was a nice way to relax and unwind after a tiring day.

Whatever was causing my recent ailment seemed to be under control and I was feeling much more energetic than for some time. I had received a telephone call from the doctor to say my chest X-ray was normal, whatever that means, so everything seemed to be pointing towards some kind of allergy or nasty virus that I was finally shaking off.

The Shopping trip on Friday 28th August took up most of the day and most of Saturday 29th August I spent updating the village web site, being a large update and not having done so for a couple of weeks. I did nip out to help Jenny with her car boot stock occasionally in preparation for the following day and I finished the day by packing the car in readiness.

Trading on Sunday 30th August was again slow. Considering that most of the sales were quite small, we did rather well and we managed to sell just about a bit of everything we took.

We spent most of Monday 31st August sorting the car boot stock in preparation for and anticipation of another day's trading the following Sunday. We would have been back at our pitch again, car boot sales being held on Bank Holidays as well as Sundays, but the weather forecast had been unfavourable. As it turned out, it was not a bad day.

Next month: the results of my ECG – am I still alive? Also, more car boot sale news. And will we be able to harvest enough blackberries to make yet more jam? This is far more exciting than “Newsnight” or even “Coronation Street” or “Eastenders”.