

Greenmount – December 2010

The first week of December saw the snow and icy conditions continue. Installing the log fire seems to have been one of my better decisions. Unfortunately, while the fire raises temperatures well above the threshold required for the central heating thermostat in the entrance hall, the weather lowers them well below that required to prevent the frost thermostat in the garage from overriding it. The consequence of this is that both we and the garage are kept nice and warm and the gas supplier gets very rich.

On Wednesday 2nd December, we made an effort to clean the lounge as a pre-requisite for erecting and decorating the Christmas tree. We got as far as dragging the tree and decorations out of the loft in the garage.

The exercise continued on Thursday when we managed to half decorate the tree. The rest of the intervening time was taken up with routine chores, like fixing my desk top PC and checking Jenny's new laptop for viruses. This latter exercise was expedited by the installation of Norton Internet Security software from a one-year, single-PC licence DVD, supplied with the laptop and which I had mistakenly consigned to the car boot stock, thinking it to be a limited trial version. Spot the idiot.

On Friday morning we had a dental appointment for the six-monthly check-up. As we set off at 9:26 a.m., the car was registering a temperature of -9.5°C. I am pleased to say that both of us required only a clean and polish. In my case, this is something of a record, being two in a row without drilling the depths. In Jenny's case, the dentist told her she had exceptionally good teeth for her age. By gum!

This was followed by the regular, weekly shop and, on returning, I finally managed to update the village web site, adding pictures taken of the village on the 23rd November and removing all reference to Scout contacts at the request of the new Group Scout Führerin.

After exhaustive testing, I have discovered that Nero MediaHome version 4.4.26.3 works and version 4.5.8.0 doesn't. Sorry, Microsoft (see last month). I have told the Nero support staff and decided to accept the refund of the license fee offered to me. It was my intention to look at an alternative product, Mezzmo from Conceiva (it sounds good, doesn't it?) to share my computer media with my television.

We awoke on Saturday 4th December to another three inches of snow. Fortunately, a thaw had set in and that, together with some rain and sleet, started to turn things very messy. Carrie's mother, Marie, telephoned to say they would not be able to make it to the Lancashire evening at the Cricket Club because they were snowed in and it's a long walk from Ramsbottom.

We continued decorating the Christmas tree, interrupted by another of Jenny's visits to the hair dresser, this time in preparation for the evening's festivities.

The Lancashire Evening's entertainment, although a week late (Lancashire Day is 27th November, but not many people know that), was most enjoyable, with Lancashire songs, clog dancing, and some audience participation. The entertainer was Sid Calderbank, who

brought his friends along, which is just as well, because they did most of the work.

By Monday 6th December, the Christmas Tree was finally lit up in the lounge and I was flat out on the garage floor, having fallen off the ladder up to the garage loft, while putting away the empty boxes. I was lucky. The ground broke my fall. I felt like a fish – battered.

On Tuesday 7th we paid a visit to the Trafford Centre, primarily to purchase more bedding for the new bed and a mirror for the lounge from John Lewis. In the event, we had to place an in-store order on the Internet for the mirror because none were in stock and we purchased the wrong bed linen. Lunch at Costa Coffee was alright though.

Wednesday 8th December was potter round Ramsbottom day again. Jenny found yet another book at one of the charity shops.

The most notable activity on Thursday 9th December was that of making seven jars of Seville Orange marmalade from organic oranges which we purchased from Unicorn a week and a half previously. Thanks to the cool storage conditions in the garage, these kept very well and, with the aid of the cook's thermometer we purchased a long time ago and kept forgetting to use, on this occasion we discovered that the gas hob does not supply sufficient heat for the pan to reach the setting point. This seems a bit odd, since, in the past, without the thermometer, we have successfully made jam and marmalade using the same technique. We decided to remove the thermometer and proceed using the old fashioned method of deploying a vertical, wet finger.

Coming a close second was the news that Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats and deputy PM, had performed a complete U-turn on the party's policy in respect of university tuition fees and supported the vote to increase them to £9,000 per year. Needless to say, students are just slightly annoyed – and quite rightly so. Guy Fawkes wasn't all bad.

Come the next election, for whom does one vote? Choices will be the Labour Party, which almost bankrupted the country, the Conservative Party, which believes the rich should get richer and the poor don't matter and the Liberal Democratic Party, which must have the biggest forked tongue in global politics. I guess it's time to give the Green Party a chance. At least they believe in the future, if we have one.

Friday 10th was another busy day, grocery shopping at Unicorn, calling in at John Lewis, Trafford Centre to change the bed linen and collect the mirror for the lounge and more grocery shopping at Tesco Prestwich, after which Jenny went off to church to help with the assembly of Christingles for the ceremony on the following Sunday. While Jenny was away, I watched the documentary "End of the Line", confirming the depletion of our oceans and that fish stocks will expire around the middle of this century, courtesy of the greed of the few (Japan, please note). On Jenny's return, I put up the new mirror in the lounge, only to discover it was too high up for smaller people, like Jenny.

On Saturday, I corrected the mistake of the previous day, lowering the position of the mirror by 14 centimetres, so that the bottom of the frame is only a millimetre or two above the mantle shelf and the top screw hole of the three for each of the supporting brackets, from their original position, is now a centimetre above the top of the mirror frame. This additional

feature comes at no extra cost.

On Sunday 12th December, Jenny and Rachel went off to supervise their Beavers at the church Christingle service. I was thinking of going with my camera but I have been suffering with internal pains, I assume due to my fall in the garage. If I feel like this after falling a few feet, I hate to think what I'd feel like after falling a couple of hundred.

On Monday 13th December, Jenny went to lunch with her friend Karen. I kept the cats company. In the evening, Jenny and Rachel went to help out at the Beavers' Christmas party. I kept the cats company again.

On Tuesday 14th December we went to Bolton, Christmas shopping (or at least, that was the plan), stopping off at Tottington Post Office to send off the Christmas cards.

Our first stop was Debenhams, where Jenny found a nice pair of pyjamas, except they didn't have her size. A helpful assistant found one pair available online and placed an order for us. We could have done that without leaving the comfort of our arm chairs.

The next port of call was Next. Quite logical, when you think about it. This is not a shop I normally associate with quality, but, on this occasion, Jenny found two nice tops and some ear rings and I bought a VW Campervan T-shirt. This shows the exploded view (Al Quaida please note) of the technical parts, courtesy of the Haynes Manual, giving repair and maintenance instructions, not that these are much use since there aren't many of these vehicles around anymore. It's a 60's thing. That's 1960's, not over 60's, although, in my case, both apply.

We then drifted up to the Sony shop to look at TVs with the intention of buying one for Rachel for Christmas. The model I had in mind had been discontinued and I obtained a price for its successor, not that they had any in stock. They did, naturally, have plenty of a slightly better model at a higher price. I resolved to look for one on the Internet.

A good long walk took us to Maplins to look at electronic bits and pieces. At over £40 for a 5 metre HDMI cable, I resolved to look for one of those on the Internet as well.

We returned to the car and home for a long needed cup of tea.

On Wednesday 15th I decided to wash the car. That is, I did until I discovered the outside tap was faulty again, courtesy of Gremlin Number One. Having only replaced it in July, I removed the offending item and sped off to B&Q with the receipt to obtain an exchange. I decided to swap it for one without a non-return valve, not the type one should fit to a garden hose but, having had two fail, I wasn't going to chance a third.

I fitted the replacement tap, only to realise I had forgotten that the hose connector was broken, courtesy of Gremlin Number Two and also needed to be replaced. I had no alternative means of connecting the hose pipe to the tap and proceeded to wash the car, ferrying buckets of cold water to the car as and when necessary and with great frequency.

During this energetic exercise, Mike called in with some documentation from Christine, the

relevance of which will become clear later. Or perhaps not.

After a spot of lunch, I relaxed briefly and studied the information from Christine. (Told you). This concerned Ralph Rooney and his relatives, Ralph having been a lay Baptist preacher of these parts in the late 1800s. To cut a long story short, using the information, I was able to find the death of Hannah Rooney in 1904, catalogued in the search index at www.ancestry.co.uk as Hannah Roonet, which explains why I had been able to find the record thus far, this being my one and only success of the day.

By this time, the fire in the lounge needed lighting and Gremlin Number 3 put out the first attempt.

Gremlin Number 4 made its ugly appearance when I tried to order a Sony TV for Rachel on the Internet. The lowest priced supplier on Amazon was out of stock. The next best buy with VAT cash-back and a five year guarantee at John Lewis was also out of stock. I left a message asking to be notified when they came into stock. (Could this be a stocking filler?)

On to Gremlin Number 5. For the previous couple of days, I had been trying to buy some organic pork for New Year's Day dinner for a party of nine. Our usual organic butcher in Bolton was no longer supplying organic pork due to the high cost. I found a supplier in Macclesfield and decided to E-mail them for information. It was then I discovered that the connection to my E-mail from Jenny's new laptop did not work. Instead, Internet Explorer crashed with a Data Execution Prevention error. A good hours searching for a solution on the Internet found a Microsoft discussion forum in which it said there wasn't a solution. I left a personal message for Bill Gates.

On Thursday 16th December, I ordered the Sony television from John Lewis for Rachel and was told to expect delivery the following Tuesday. The TV receives terrestrial (Freeview) digital channels and is high definition. It also receives Internet TV and plays movies from my computer. I also ordered Jenny's present – the complete collection of The Good Life. Does this mean I shall be digging up the back lawn in the New Year?

I finally found a supplier of organic pork and ordered a 3.6 Kg leg joint from Rhug farm in Wales. In order to avoid the £12.50 carriage, I added half an organic Welsh lamb to the order, to put in the chest freezer in the garage.

After the following relatively quiet week end and lots of snow, I was beginning to wonder if any of my orders would make it in time for Christmas, this being just about the only country in the world that can't cope with the stuff.

Despite the prevailing conditions, the television arrived on the 21st, as promised and we managed to hide it in the front bedroom before Rachel came home from work.

My meat also arrived – at Greenmount Butchers. The butcher telephoned me to say he had my order, labelled "Turkey", which he was expecting and had opened the box, only to discover it was lamb. Then he had read the delivery label. Meanwhile, his turkey was winging its way to me. The delivery man arrived here, having first tried to deliver it to Mike's house, number 40. My delivery instructions had been to use this alternative location should we be

out. He told Mike he had a delivery for him and disappeared to the van, not to be seen by him again. Instead he came here, opened up his van, closed it again, got in and drove off. He had obviously realised the mix-up with the orders and was on his way back to the butchers.

I telephoned the butcher to say the delivery man was on his way back to him, by which time he had arrived. He eventually came back with my order.

I checked the contents. The lamb was alright but on the small side. That's the Welsh for you. The 3.6 Kg pork leg joint had shrunk to 1.5 Kg. I looked up my confirmation order, which had the original weight on it. I then verified my invoice only to discover I had been charged for a 1.5 Kg leg joint as delivered. And, because this lower price had reduced the order total below the threshold for free delivery, there was a £12.50 carriage charge.

Now the whole point of ordering a 3.6 Kg joint was such that I could cut it into two to produce one large enough to feed seven on New Year's Day and a smaller one for us later. I contacted Rhug farm, only to be told they had run out of pork due to the Christmas rush. I received no apology for shipping the wrong sized joint initially. After a second exchange of messages, I did receive a brief apology and confirmation that I would receive a refund of the shipping charge. I shan't be doing business with Rhug farm again and I wouldn't recommend them to others.

The contingency plan (B) was to purchase a large organic turkey from Asda.

On Christmas Eve, we went round to the church to sing carols round the tree outside in the snow and arctic temperature. Dressed in two layers of thermal clothing and three layers of more conventional dress, I was nice and snug. Jenny was also well-wrapped for the conditions and, on arrival, asked where everyone was. The majority of people had gone inside the church and she went in to drag them outside. Being unprepared for the cold, many were not best pleased. Nevertheless, the scheduled twenty minutes or so of community singing and freezing took place, after which we all went into church for the service and yet more carols. It was at this point that I felt the need to shed a few layers.

Christmas was a quiet affair, with just the three of us enjoying a lovely roast pork dinner. Of all the presents, Rachel had the most and I had the least. So what's new? I spent most of Christmas Day helping Rachel install her new television.

On the 27th, we turned out in the snow, sleet and under grey skies for the annual community walk. This normally attracts around thirty or so people. On this occasion, there were just five of us, which is just as well, given the terrain traversed, because most of the regular thirty would not have made the gradient. We crossed Two Brooks Valley from Hollymount, climbing the steep half mile or so from Bottoms Hall up to Holcombe Road on a narrow, winding, woodland track and then took the footpath opposite, winding our way across the fields to Affetside. Filled with mulled wine and mince pies, we returned to Hollymount via a similar route using paths slightly more westward, not without incident. Jenny managed to fall down twice in the thick snow, the second occasion being on top of me. Under different circumstances....

By the 28th, I had completed the reinstallation of Windows on my desk top PC for the third

time in a year and it was up and running as normal again. It is in better condition than I.

The 29th December was a cleaning day and I turned into Mr Scrubbit, giving the kitchen floor a good going over. This event was precipitated by the pending gathering for New Year's Day dinner.

On the 30th December we had been invited over to Leeds to visit John and Jane for a family gathering. Rachel, Matthew and Carrie were all working and, unfortunately, could not join us. It was nice to see my younger sister's family again and it was a shame that Andy and Julie's husband, Keith, could not make it.

The last day of the year was something of an anti-climax, with just the three of us at home. Guess which idiot went out into the cold, furnished with a stick and a piece of coal, to let in the New Year.

And so we wish you all a very Happy New Year and may 2011 bring you good health, happiness and enough wealth to live in the manner to which I have become accustomed.