

Greenmount – December 2011

Thursday 1st December was the start of a very busy period, especially for Jenny. Thursday and Friday evenings were the usual Beaver evenings, which I cleverly managed to avoid, spending instead yet more time on Thursday morning decorating the Old School cellar.

After Grocery shopping on the 2nd, Jenny and Rachel stayed behind on Friday for the Cubs' session because some of her Beavers were moving up to Cubs after Christmas and they had a "taster" session. We managed to grab a late tea about 9 p.m.

On Saturday 3rd, Rachel and Jenny were supervising the Beavers at Ramsbottom baths for their staged swimming badge and Jenny nearly ended up being thrown into the water fully-clothed by one of her male colleagues. It seems this is normal behaviour amongst Scout leaders and, in true tradition, one should, when going near water, *be prepared* with a change of dry clothing and a towel. One lives and learns – unless one drowns.

I submitted my opinion on vehicle carbon-dioxide emissions to the EU and, what is more, granted permission for my comments to be published. The bounty must be mounting.

In the evening, we went to the Cricket Club for the Lancashire Evening, being entertained by the Dodgers and the Saggy Bottom Girls. I have to say they girls were much better than their name suggests and the three of them harmonised very well, singing traditional Lancashire songs. The Dodgers, three chaps, were also most entertaining and the whole evening was, for those of us who like folk music, most enjoyable. The hot supper, at half time, was passable but not organic! The beer wasn't bad either, but, being from Yorkshire, it wouldn't be, would it?

On Sunday 4th we were up early for the Toy Service at the church and I spent the rest of the day catching up on computer work, including renewing the subscription to Norton Internet Security for two years on Jenny's laptop and purchasing Norton Utilities in the bargain. Although all this cost me £55, the license is for two years and covers up to three PCs.

Rachel had spent the Saturday evening and part of Sunday morning decorating the Christmas tree in the lounge and it looked very nice indeed.

On Monday 5th we went into Ramsbottom for Jenny's piano lesson and the usual tour round the charity shops, from which we bought the Christmas cards.

On Wednesday 7th we had a dental appointment. Jenny escaped with a clean and polish, while I was told I had a small hole that needed filling, for which I was invited back in January. This was followed by a trip to Asda at Pillsworth to supplement our groceries and, as it turned out, our wine cupboard, Nottage Hill Chardonnay being on offer at £4 a bottle.

On Thursday 8th I was back in the Old School cellar, paintbrush in hand. We also managed to remove the door to cut about 3 mm off the bottom so that it would open fully. Judging by the screws, it looked as though it had not been taken off since it was first installed over 100 years ago. This lively activity was followed by lunch in the Bull's Head, where we sought to put the world to rights once again and where the cash machine dispensed me £20 when I

had asked it for £50. Fortunately, although the mechanics proved to be unreliable, at least the electronics worked and only debited my bank account with the sum issued. This went some way to proving the argument we electrical engineers used to have with the mechanical engineers at university. It didn't help my cash-flow situation though.

On Friday 9th we went grocery shopping to Unicorn and Tesco at Prestwich, the latter being almost devoid of organic meat. We resolved to place online orders with Abel and Cole for organic meat in the future and the reasons for continuing to shop at Tesco, I am pleased to say, are rapidly diminishing.

On Saturday 10th Jenny decided we were going to tackle the garage. One of us (guess who) was given the task of tidying out the garage loft, while Jenny (oops!) picked up the debris as it fell from the loft. Fortunately, she didn't have to pick me up. Much of the rubbish went into the car boot, ready for a trip to the tip.

On Sunday 11th I spend most of the day in church, preparing for the Christingle service, attending the Christingle service and tidying up after the Christingle service. The service itself was very good and the candle-lit finale a beautiful sight. It made it all worthwhile.

Monday 12th was the Beaver party and I was seconded to take pictures of the event. I ended up also supervising the bouncy castle to ensure Beavers didn't bounce on each-other.

On Tuesday 13th, Jenny and I went out in the cold and cut back the holly tree that was encroaching on the garage roof. We had left it so late because Jenny wanted some of the holly, with berries, inside the house for Christmas and had I cut it earlier, the holly would have died. Unfortunately, by this time, the birds had eaten most of the berries.

I was invited to a Greenmount committee lunch at the Bull's Head, for which, I hasten to add, each paid for their own meal.

Wednesday 14th December Greenmount: The day started an hour late – or, at least, ours did. We got up later than planned. After breakfast, we caught the 11:33 bus into Bolton, after delivering all the local Christmas cards on foot. We had intended to catch the 10:00 a.m. bus and then discovered at 10:35 that there wasn't one. It had been due at the Bull's Head at 10:33 and they only ran every hour.

My main purpose was to obtain a device to convert a computer network socket (RJ45) to a telephone socket (RJ11, I think). These devices are known as baluns and come in no less than three versions, with which I shall not bore you. Suffice it to say I had checked on the Internet that Maplin sold the one I wanted in their shop and I headed straight for it on reaching Bolton, only to discover they were out of stock. I managed to find a couple of items Mike had asked me to get so the trip was not a complete waste of time.

Jenny did the tour of the usual clothes shops, finding nothing exciting and we had lunch in the refurbished market hall, which, now a modern shopping centre, bears no resemblance to its name. We were fortunate to find a Costa Coffee food outlet in the middle of the hall, having been less so earlier, the café we sought now, like so many of the high street shops, empty.

I found three beautiful, hand-blown, glass ornaments for the Christmas tree and a double CD of war film music in Past Times and a calendar for my sister, Edith, in New Zealand.

We made the bus stop in time to catch the 15:18 bus back to Greenmount, except that the timetable there said it only ran during school holidays and, since there wasn't a bus at 16:18, we were faced with a long wait until 17:18. I was studying the alternative route options on the timetable when Jenny exclaimed "480" and I just managed to halt the bus before it rushed past us. So much for the timetable which, I must say, was at odds with the one on the Internet, in which I should have placed more faith. I never thought I would say that about the Internet.

We arrived home in good enough time to walk to the post office before the collection to send off the Christmas cards, including the ones to New Zealand. What we had not budgeted time for was a boiler leaking all over the garage floor, no heating, no hot water and what is worse, no logs cut for the fire, particularly as the temperature was two degrees and falling.

I did what I could to stem the flow, stop the boiler from trying to work and I placed a call for a gas engineer for Friday morning. We then drove to the post office and sent off the cards as planned, except that the last air mail posting date for NZ was 9th December.

On returning, I kept an eye on the boiler, installed an electric fan heater in the garage to warm it up and dry it out and cut some logs and lit the fire. I also managed to snatch some tea.

Thankfully the day ended.

And, not surprisingly, a new day dawned. I never did like Thursdays, especially cold ones. I spent most of the day in the garage loft, tidying it out, getting rid of rubbish and making some space for some of Jenny's car boot stock in the hope of clearing the garage sufficiently to house one of the cars. Now, there's a novel idea. While up there, I took the opportunity to lag the central heating and water pipes to prevent them from freezing up, as they did last year.

My cramped exploits, having turned me into a hideous dwarf (did I hear someone say "What's new?"), were interrupted by a visit from Frank, one of the village maintenance team. He arrived with a sack of logs for me for the fire, knowing my heating problem and also that I had no logs cut for burning. What a nice gesture that was. I exchanged the bag of logs for four cans of Guinness, left over from Jenny's 60th birthday. I told Frank the cans were past their best, as am I, but he said he'd try them anyway.

Friday was a better day. It was my intention to return to the garage loft but I was roused from my bed by a call from the gas engineer who said he would be here in twenty minutes. He was at the door before I had time to feed the cats, much to their displeasure. I explained the problem, showed him to the boiler in the garage, put on the electric fan heater for him, offered him a warm drink, left him to it and went back to the cats which, by then, were searching for the tin opener.

While the engineer was moving to and fro, between the garage and his van, using the kitchen, since the direct route through the garage was blocked by car boot stock and sawdust, Mike arrived to tell me that our racking for the Old School cellar had arrived the day before. Close on his heels was the Abel and Cole driver with our grocery order, including a 2.5 Kg boned leg of pork for New Year's Day dinner.

The gas engineer fixed our boiler problem. There were two leaks, one on the cold water inlet and one on the hot water outlet. Why these should suddenly have appeared is a mystery. Having thoroughly dampened the inside of the boiler, there was a concern that the electronics might not operate as it should. The engineer dried out the circuit board using the fan heater and then switched on the heating. We were once again back in the *twentieth* century and the cats were happy.

Once he had left, we resolved to make our way to Unicorn for the week's groceries. Then Jenny decided she would put the new cover on the ironing board. While in the middle of sorting that out, our religious visitor arrived and we spent a good couple of hours discussing Jazz.

When he left, it was time for lunch.

We finally hit the road at 3:15 p.m., returning about 6:30 p.m. Adding to our perfect day was a limping cat. On further examination, we ascertained that Toffee had two long claws on her right front paw embedded in her pads and she was obviously finding it difficult to walk. I tried calling the vet, which closed at 7 p.m. I rang the emergency number given on the answer-phone only to find the number was not in use. Well done Mr Regan. I eventually discovered that one of their main branches, where we took Treacle last, was open on Saturday mornings.

On Saturday 17th, I telephoned the main branch of the vets and was advised that the problem could be dealt with by their Radcliffe branch, which was open and was nearer. Jenny and Rachel took Toffee to the vets in Radcliffe, this being the nearest surgery open on the day. All Toffee's claws were very long and the vet clipped them. One of Toffee's front pads had been punctured and the vet applied some antiseptic ointment and told us to keep the cat in for a few days, washing her paws in salt water after using her litter tray. The cat was having none of this, insisting on going out, so she had her paws washed when she came in. It seems we need to clip her claws about every four weeks, since she doesn't wear them down and, at a cost of £40 a time, this was going to be expensive. An alternative was to purchase some clippers and do it ourselves. This we would have done had they had any. The vet said they would order some for us to collect at their premises in Bury.

In the evening, Jenny was at the Carol Concert at the church, serving coffee and mince pies at the interval. I did intend to go but I was too tired and stayed in by the warm fire.

We had planned to go to Sheffield on Sunday 18th but the Woodhead Pass was closed due to snow and ice so we settled for second best and caught the bus into Ramsbottom. The bus we went to catch down on Longsite Road (there isn't a service through the village on Sundays) didn't come and we had to wait over half an hour for the next one. Apparently, the

inch or so of overnight snow had prevented some drivers from getting into work. I reflected on the public transport systems in the Scandinavian countries that, reportedly, run like clockwork all year round. Maybe they have a different type of snow to us.

The day was not wasted. We saw some hawks and owls shivering on display and a single reindeer with a single antler sat on the cold ground. Apparently their antlers drop off each year and then re-grow. I'm surprised nothing else drops off.

We saw the closing scenes of the adult nativity being enacted outside the church in freezing conditions and toured the charity shops in which I picked up several DVDs. The success of our day out took a turn for the worse as we had just missed a bus for the return journey and decided to walk home, the alternative being a half-hour wait. This proved to be both quicker and warmer than waiting for the bus.

On Monday 19th, Jenny went for her piano lesson in Ramsbottom and collected a metronome we had ordered. Afterwards she met her friend Karen for lunch. On her return home, I examined the metronome only to find it was the wrong model. Having asked the opinion of the owner of the music shop where Jenny has her lessons (A&L Music) and discussed the options with Rachel, who offered to pay half towards the cost, I had requested a Wittner pyramid metronome, with bell, finished in oak, for which we had agreed a price of £110. What we got was a Wittner pyramid metronome, without bell, finished in oak for £110. To cut a long story short, we arranged to return the metronome for a full refund and get the one we wanted elsewhere, since A&L Music could not obtain it.

On Tuesday 20th, Jenny returned the metronome, to the obvious displeasure of the proprietor of the shop and subsequently went to lunch with two other friends, Lynn and Sheila, while I toiled in the garage loft. I intended to go back and look for my glass shoe later.

On Wednesday 21st, I was asked to help assemble the racking in the Old School Cellar and Frank and I erected four of the six racks and stacked all of the jumble that was on the cellar floor on them, creating room to actually work.

On Thursday 22nd, we finally made it to Sheffield, calling at the Old School to collect some rubbish, the tip in Bury to drop off the rubbish and my old place of work at Prestwich to see a colleague with whom I used to work because he keeps sending me a Christmas card and I didn't have his address. I was greeted by three other ex-colleagues as well and it was nice to see them all, particularly since they all told me how well I looked and that I hadn't changed a bit (I assume that was a compliment).

On reaching Sheffield, Jenny stayed with her niece, Tracey while I went up to see my sister, Barbara, who had, due to a misunderstanding in communication on Skype, expected me the day before, when my niece, Julie and her son, Robbie were there.

Returning home, we called in on Jenny's cousin, Reuben, in Penistone. Reuben was just about to dish up tea as we arrived and invited us to stay, which we did and for which we were very grateful, not only for the food but to have the opportunity to chat with both Reuben and his wife, Linda.

On Friday 23rd, we dropped off a load of clothes at Tracey's in Bury for recycling before heading off to Tesco for an organic Turkey and a few other bits and pieces we couldn't get elsewhere. Having taken these groceries home, I didn't feel like making another journey out so we left the rest of the food shop until Saturday.

We called in on Matthew and Carrie on the way to Unicorn on Saturday 24th. We had an arrangement with them whereby we had agreed not to exchange presents this year. Then they promptly gave us a few bundles to bring home and I was sorry we had to leave fairly quickly, being concerned that there wouldn't be much left at Unicorn, this being Christmas Eve

As it turned out, Unicorn had lots of lovely organic vegetables and fruit. We called at Asda Pillsworth on the way back to buy some Yoghurt we can't get anywhere else. Asda didn't have anything else we wanted in the organic line and we left for Tesco Bury, where we found that the organic turkeys had been reduced to half price. With our luck, if we had waited until Saturday to buy one at a reduced price, there wouldn't have been any left.

In the evening, we would have gone out for a meal at the local Chinese Restaurant in Ramsbottom (the Eastern Eye) had they not been fully booked. We settled for a take-away.

We had planned to go to the Watchnight Service at the church and sing carols outside, round the Christmas tree, but it was pouring with rain so we decided against it.

The first highlight of the 25th was opening the presents. Apart from the usual exchange of gifts, Jenny and Rachel received several presents from Beaver parents and we had the presents from Matthew and Carrie and also from Barbara and from my niece, Julie. Jenny and Rachel also received presents from friends.

The second highlight of the day was the roast turkey dinner, complete with a bottle of organic Champagne.

We spent the evening playing Trivial Pursuit, which Jenny won.

On the 26th, Jenny and I decided to go for a stroll for some fresh air and took the opportunity to deliver leaflets advertising the Ralph Rooney book "The Story of My Life", recently revised and reprinted by the village community, to a number of houses in the village. The fact that the leaflets suggested this would make an ideal Christmas present should give some indication that the leaflets were supposed to have been delivered some days before.

We had another roast turkey dinner in the evening and played Snakes and Ladders and Ludo (I wonder how many kids today have heard of those?) before settling down to watch a new episode of Agatha Christie's Poirot, played by David Suchet.

On Tuesday 27th, Jenny and I went on the annual Christmas walk around Two Brooks valley with hot mulled wine and mince pies being served at the car park of Hawkshaw Tennis Club. The recent mild, wet weather not only made the going heavy but also made my boots very damp on the inside as well as the outside. To say the day started off wet and dull, the walk

was well attended, with 23 people ploughing up the footpaths. A pleasant surprise was to see on the walk Lesley Hopkinson, with whom I used to work at Prestwich and whom I have not seen for years.

On Thursday 29th, we resumed our big clean after spending the previous day thinking about it. It was the turn of the kitchen and entrance hall, completed on 31st, punctuated by a day's grocery shopping, as usual.

New Year's Eve was a quiet affair, just missing the midnight chimes on Big Ben because our lounge grandfather clock stopped at 11:51 p.m. Some idiot forgot to wind it. We did tune in to watch the huge, spectacular firework display in London and wondered how much it cost and who was paying for it in these troubled economic times. Not-so-Great Britain seemed to be celebrating it's bankruptcy in style.