

Greenmount – February 2011

The first four days of February were pre-occupied with first trying to resolve the problems on Christine Taylor's desk-top computer and then, that having failed, performing a clean installation of Windows Vista. On a positive note, Dell had shipped the issue discs with the system and I was able to use these to reformat the disc partition and reinstall Windows Vista, rather than having to rely on the restore partition.

I was also able to back up all of Christine's E-mail and documents onto my 1 TB external hard drive by running the original system in safe mode. Clever me.

After reinstalling Vista, the excessively large number of updates issued by Microsoft in such a short lifetime of the operating system must be a testament to the poor design quality of Vista and even after returning the computer and installing all the remaining device drivers, updates continue to appear on almost a daily basis. Methinks it would be in Microsoft's interests to give all Vista licence-holders a free upgrade to Windows 7.

I had collected the PC on the 1st February and spent most of that day trying to fix it, to avoid the inevitable reload. Not a chance.

On the 2nd February, the rebuild of Christine's computer system was interrupted by a need to go in search of rabbit masks. This was not, as some may think, to conceal my handsome features and modesty, but for the Beavers to celebrate the Chinese New Year on the following day.

On the 3rd February, having failed to find any suitable rabbit masks, we decided to manufacture our own and I download a drawing from the Internet which I modified and managed to print onto the card we had, last month, bought from Asda to print Jenny's birthday invitations, that attempt being unsuccessful. It took us a good hour to cut these out and to cut out the eyes, for the Beavers to colour and wear. Who said it was only an hour a week? To all the Chinese-speaking people reading this, Xin Nian Kuai Le (and I can pronounce it).

On 4th February, being Friday, we went grocery shopping. Happily, I was able to off-set this regular experience on this occasion by returning Christine's PC and spending three hours trying to install all the remaining software for her printer/scanner, webcam, camera, etc. By 7 p.m., hunger was getting the better of me and I left with two remaining items to install. This I timed nicely, returning to a meal of line-caught tuna cooked in soy sauce and garlic with organic vegetables and jacket potato and a nice, well-deserved bottle of Australian Chardonnay.

On 5th February, we went to The Old School to help with preparations for the jumble sale to be held later in the month. Jenny was sorting and pricing toys and bric-a-brac and I was testing and pricing electrical equipment. Needless to say we came home with a few items, including a Frost DVD I did not have.

On Sunday 6th February Jenny went to Church Parade with her Beavers, having an ensemble of 16 out of a total of 18, which is an excellent attendance, due in no small part to the

support Jenny receives from the parents. I went to finish off Christine's PC repair at 1 p.m. We decided not to go to the Wassail in the afternoon at the Hollymount Orchard because the weather was poor. Neither did we attend the evening of music in the local church. We might have done had we known about it earlier but we didn't get to hear about it until the day. And I run the web page for the village.

The 7th February was another wet, windy, dull, cold, miserable day and I spent it catching up on a lot of PC housekeeping work, including writing the January and February monthly updates, for which I had to rely, largely, on Jenny's journal entries. My memory isn't what it was. I've forgotten what it was like but I'm sure it was better than it is now.

My printer cartridges I had ordered from Inkmasters on 1st February finally arrived. The service is normally much better than this, with next-day delivery by first class post being the norm. On this occasion, the parcel arrived by Fed-Ex, which probably explains the delay. And you thought the Post Office was bad. On examination of the invoice, I note I have paid nearly £12 on this order to the Chancellor in VAT. This is a lot and he doesn't deserve it. At £11 a cartridge and the printer needing seven different colours, this is getting a little expensive.

My next opportunity to put finger to keyboard was at 6 a.m. on Sunday 13th February as we rose to embark on the first car boot sale of the season. Thankfully, this was indoors at the local high school, since it was pitch black, cold and pouring with rain. The weather did not deter the customers who, in these austere times, were, no doubt, looking for even more bargains. At least we don't charge any VAT.

The intervening period I spent trying to tidy up multi-media files on my PC and Jenny's laptop and just when I thought I was making progress, I went and recorded some more.

I have also been suffering from some rather nasty abdominal pains, although everything seems to be in working order., more or less, apart from the ongoing battle with my benign prostatic hyperplasia, which sounds so good, you could probably set it to music. I think I have been overdoing it with all the cleaning, polishing and scrubbing, not to mention poking about in the drains. Anyway, I'm back on the nettle tea for now, having suspended my intake of Saw Palmetto and/or Urtica tinctures as my condition did improve quite dramatically. The last time I saw my GP, which was not so long ago, he checked out my prostate again and didn't find a problem, so it's probably all in the mind.

We spent the previous morning of 12th February at the Old School, preparing yet more items for the jumble sale and acquiring yet more odd bits and pieces (odd being the operative word).

On 14th February, we walked into Ramsbottom and back for a few groceries, doing our bit for the environment by not using the car and for the bank manager in not spending more of the money we haven't got on diesel. Being St. Valentine's day, I broke with tradition and bought Jenny a bouquet of ten red roses (sorry, Mr Bank Manager).

One of the aspects of banking that has puzzled me for a while is that when I spend more money than is in my account, not only do I have to pay it back but I am charged interest on the overdraft; when bank financial advisers spend money they haven't got, not only is the debt often written off but they are also paid large bonuses for using other people's money to recover from the situation. So how does that work then?

We finally managed to find time to unpack the car from the car boot sale on Tuesday 15th February and started to sort out and price more of the stock in the garage in readiness for the next one. We had to leave that task so that Jenny could go off to her Yoga class.

The sun shone again on 16th February and Jenny managed to hang out her washing for about the third time this year. I emptied and cleaned the recycle bins we keep in the kitchen and cast my eye over the back garden, still heavily waterlogged and full of moss, not to mention cat doo-doo's. I resolved to tidy it up once we have three days of fine weather on the trot, an event that occurs here on average about twice a year. It needs two days to drain and dry out.

Jenny and Rachel went off to the cinema in the afternoon, this being Orange Wednesday (Orange Mobile, with which we are all registered on pay-as-you-go, offers two cinema tickets for the price of one on Wednesdays). I rarely go to the cinema these days because most of the films made today, in my opinion, are simply rubbish. They are so full of computerised special effects that direction has ceased to be an art-form, as it certainly was in the days of great directors like John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock to mention but three. (Sorry, Alfred, wherever you are).

Thursday 17th February was not a bad day either and Mike called round to tell of his previous day's walking on the Wainwright Fells in the Lake District, at which I turned green with envy. If I were up to the distances he walks, I would have joined him and the rest of the village hiking group but, sadly, I am out of practice and need to make the time to take more exercise. I do tend to use my brain a lot but, unfortunately, that doesn't get me up hills. It often gets me into holes though.

Jenny disappeared off to Bury with Rachel again, uttering the words "I shan't be long" as she stepped out of the door. Several hours later, she had not reappeared and, being hungry, I went foraging in unfamiliar territory - the fridge - for food. I had just made myself a nice sandwich and cup of tea as Jenny arrived back, asking if I had made enough tea for her as well. I shall not comment further.

I made the mistake of catching up on the news in the evening. It seems that the problems in Bahrain have pushed up fuel prices yet again and my thoughts once more turned to selling the car and buying a horse. I also heard that our bankers are emigrating to Switzerland because of our high taxes. It's a pity they didn't go sooner. If they had, we wouldn't be in the mess we're in today. All I can say is that Switzerland's loss is our gain.

Friday 18th February was another cold, dull day but at least the forecast had changed and rain was no longer expected. We embarked on a marathon grocery shopping spree, down to Unicorn in Chorlton, calling at Tesco Prestwich and Asda Pillsworth on the way back. And we still didn't get everything we wanted. It's getting harder to find the organic items we consume as the big supermarkets (NB not Unicorn) keep changing the lines they stock,

chasing ever increasing profits at the expense of quality. In fact, the very success of supermarkets is proof that the majority of people will eat anything and question nothing, so long as it's cheap.

Saturday 19th February marked the start of the long weekend preparations for the next village jumble sale at the Old School. These ended with the sale on the 21st and the subsequent dispatch of unsold, unwanted items to the needy in Salford, care of the local clergy. Those items, that is, that didn't find their way into our garage, in exchange for us taking all the rubbish to the dump in Bury.

We went for an excellent meal at the Waggon and Horses at Hawkshaw on Saturday night with Mike and Lorna who live just down the road and their other long-standing friends, Frank and Gwen, who live just up the main road, past the church. The occasion was to celebrate Lorna's birthday. I shall not disclose her age. Suffice it to say that she is catching Jenny up.

Tuesday 22nd saw the ninth meeting of the Village Community Group and the outcome was the extension of the web site events calendar to seven pages. Plans for the celebration of the Royal Wedding, May Day and anything else you can think of on 2nd May are well underway and we bought tickets for the Barn Dance on 26th March. Local Hop would be a more appropriate name for the event because that's what all the women with whom I dance with will be doing.

We also learnt that the planning idiots at Bury Council have give approval for the Holcombe Brook Tennis Club to go ahead with a scheme to sell their present site to a developer to erect a large, three-storey care home and to build a new facility on green-belt land off Longsite Road. This is despite a large number of objections, recommendations to the contrary and a previous refusal. The question to be asked is why? I think this decision-making process needs closer scrutiny and I would be looking into several people's bank accounts.

Being a fine day and needing even more supplies after our grocery shop on Friday 25th, we, once again, walked into Ramsbottom for a few odds and ends. Not only did I buy Jenny lunch at Costa Coffee, Tesco Prestwich on the Friday but we also had lunch on Saturday at Bailey's Tea Rooms in Ramsbottom. I know how to spoil a woman. Waking back, it occurred to me that it would have cost less to drive in to Ramsbottom and return home for lunch. That's what you get from a Yorkshireman.

On 28th we went for a stroll down the old railway line, now a walkway and cycle path. This currently stops about a third of the way to Bury and we walked to the end to see what progress was being made by Bury Council to complete the route into the city centre, having been sitting on a grant to help fund the project for over a year. I am pleased to say that work had finally started at both ends, that is where the current path ends and where the path will emerge on Brandlesholme Road on the approach to Bury centre. Let us hope that the two ends eventually meet up.

Unfortunately, there will still be a short stretch of the cycle route along Brandlesholme Road at its narrowest point on a significant incline. This is because the bridge for the line to pass under Brandlesholme road was filled in years ago and the line cutting on the opposite side has also been filled and used for building new homes. It wouldn't be so bad if the builder had actually finished what he started. While the houses that have been built are more or less complete and now inhabited, the area still looks like a building site. It looks like another of these over-optimistic schemes that has seen so many builders go out of business.

Anyway, this former, potential cycle-route is no longer available, thanks to the foresight of the planning department in Bury. And we, the local tax-payers, actually fund these people.

I have been thinking of a new definition of Democracy. It's a kind of political system that would work for the common good were those most eligible to run it not elected to do so, on the basis that these are the very people who use the system to suit their own ends and those of their associates.