

Greenmount – January 2009

Somehow, January always seems like a long month. It will seem even longer when you've read this.

Another year commences and the first task was to pack away the Christmas decorations, accomplished with all the usual chaos on Sunday 4th January.

Jenny commenced work again on 5th January, rapidly followed by an intake of eight new six- and almost-six-year-olds at Beavers on the evening of the 8th. DIB, DIB, DIB.

My stomach continues to be troublesome and I still haven't worked out what is causing the problem.

The extractor fan in the bathroom didn't help, either. That stopped working and I took a couple of days to prepare myself for the crawling-in-the-loft event.

I had no difficulty in finding some boards on which to lay in the loft and on which I could crawl. These were stored in the loft in the garage. I did have difficulty reaching them and bringing them down from the garage storage area though. Having carried these and the step-ladders to the landing and removing the loft access cover, I realised that I had stored the old cot in the loft in the access path to the extractor fan and I had to move that before I could lay the boards.

(We kept the cot, used by our two children, for our first grandchild. Sadly, it looks like it is surplus to requirements.)

I placed the boards in position. The only way of accessing the fan was to crawl on my stomach. Reaching the fan was no problem. I inspected the installation and worked out what tools to fetch. Reversing the process was something of a challenge and on reaching the loft opening, going through it in a controlled manner even more so. I do not encourage you to picture me balanced on the edge at my waist, my weight on my fore-arms and legs dangling, desperately searching for a foot-hold on the ladders.

Once I had mastered the technique of entering and leaving the loft, I was able to remove the fan, clean it, test it and replace it and I am now pleased to say it is once again working as it should, extracting warm moist air from the bathroom and anything else within a half-metre radius.

This process seems to be a regular exercise, my having had to clean the fan on one or two previous occasions. Sadly, it occurs too frequently to be included as an Olympic event.

Now, normally, when I undertake a job, it invariably mushrooms into three or four others. This was an exception in that there is only one other outstanding job I discovered while attending to the fan itself. When the bathroom fitter installed the new bathroom ceiling and repositioned the fan, in moving the pull-cord switch, he tightened one of the in the cover so much that it has destroyed the thread in the plastic base and the whole thing needs replacing.

Rachel's 26th birthday, on 12th January, was not very eventful for her, since she was working all day. We bought her a few bits and pieces, including the complete, illustrated works of Shakespeare. I thought this appropriate for her trip to Norway – "A Norse, a Norse, my kingdom for a Norse".

The 12th was also a sad day. Jenny, Rachel and I were invited to attend the funeral of one of our neighbours. Unfortunately, Rachel was working and could not go. Jenny and I paid our respects to the very nice lady we have known since we moved here in January 1979. She and her husband, Albert, saw our two children born and raised and a nicer couple you could not wish to have met.

The 1911 census data was released on 13th January. This is not something about which most people would be excited. To me, being interested in the family history, it is an important event. Currently the Census is only available on a Pay-as-You-Go basis from www.findmypast.com and I have asked when it will be available on the site I use, www.ancestry.co.uk.

Dell repaired Rachel's lap top in December in a most efficient manner. Amongst the items listed as being required was a new hard drive and the whole cost was pre-paid. In the event, the hard drive was not required and I have now received a refund for it. Well done Dell.

I hear reports there is a global economic crisis and there is no wonder. I can't get what I want when I order it and am prepared to pay good hard plastic for it.

I ordered a Panasonic DMC TZ5 8gb Super Kit from www.ukcamerastore.co.uk. These were advertised as being in stock. The intention was to give it to Rachel as a belated, surprise, birthday present to take on her trip to Norway. Not only are these not in stock but the store advises me that they will not be able to ship my ordered goods by the required date and I have cancelled the order. Apparently, Panasonic is to blame for not keeping delivery promises. Retailers everywhere tell me these cameras are scarcer than rocking-horse droppings and there are thousands on back order. Well done, Panasonic, who gets my first prize for their contribution to the economic crisis in England.

Next, I ordered a complete (well, all but one) set of new Canon cartridges for my Canon i990 printer from www.justinkandpaper.com. Two days later, they had taken my money. My order was part-filled, awaiting two cartridges. The one I needed was in the part-filled order but they obviously wanted to ship the lot in one delivery. The company told me they were waiting for supplies, no doubt from Canon. Well done, Canon. You get second prize, only because the cartridges are a lot cheaper than the digital camera.

Last but not least, I have asked for a quotation from a fireplace company for the installation of a conventional log-burning (dual-fuel) fire and hearth in the lounge to replace the wall-mounted gas fire. The company is a local one called Burning Desires.

We visited the show room in Ramsbottom and the young gentleman there was not able to assist us, being new to the business. He advised us to call back when his father, who owns the business, was in. This we did and we talked about what we wanted to do. He said he would send his father-in-law round to have a look. There's nothing like keeping it in the family.

Sure enough, his father-in-law, Stewart arrived and spent some time with us, surveying the requirement. He took away a picture showing the effect we wanted to create, a list of items required and a house brick so he could match it for the building work. I asked when he would be back with a quotation and he said we would have a price by the week-end.

The week-end came and went and we have received no quotation or message to say there is a delay in providing one and why this might be. In spite of the fact that the company has just completed an installation at one of our neighbours, I have reached the conclusion that this chap is, in fact, a secret brick collector and has no intention of providing a quotation.

So, well done Burning Desires, taking third place, only because I have not reached the stage of even placing an order, in the "Destruction of the English Economy Stakes".

The last time people in this country couldn't get what they wanted, at least, not without paying well over the odds for it, was when there is a war. Is the present state of affairs is due to events in Afghanistan? Perhaps I should write to the Pravda and complain.

I finally dragged my stomach to the doctor at the crack of dawn (well, 8 o'clock) on 21st January. He gave me a thorough examination, told me he could not find anything seriously wrong and advised me to keep taking the (Losec) tablets. He has doubled the dose to 40 mg per day for two weeks, when I have another appointment. If the tablets don't do the trick, I get to swallow something much larger, attached to a long tube. Nurse, the vallium!!

I also have a small black dot that moves around in my left eye, so my doctor also examined my vision. This is the first time we've seen eye to eye. It appears I have what he calls 'a floater' in my left eye. Now, I've heard of these before but not in this context. He advised me to go and see an optician because his equipment wasn't that good. I told him I wasn't interested in his matrimonial problems.

My appointment with the optician was on 22nd January and, since I am over 60, my eye tests are free. The chap at Specsavers gave me a thorough examination, for which I required drops in my eyes to enlarge the pupil. The good news is that I do not have a serious problem and that these 'floaters' are common in older people as the gel inside the eye breaks down. If I develop any more of them, especially large ones, or have any other problems I am to go back for further tests, as this ageing process can cause tears in the retina. This is obviously something to which a selection of us may grope forward.

The bad news was that the eye drops prevented me from driving for twelve hours and I was scheduled to take Rachel to the airport in the evening for her trip to Norway. Fortunately, I was able to prevail upon my good friend and neighbour, Mike and he ferried us to the airport.

The inside of Manchester Airport, Terminal 1 is like a building site and badly signposted. To add to the confusion, only one of the three available lifts was working. Having successfully completed the assault course and initiative test, we managed to find the check in desk on level 5 and then the coffee lounge on level 0. We even managed to find John, Rachel's very good friend from her previous employment at Greater Manchester Police, who had come along to see her off.

On 26th January, I rose to yet another challenge. One of the ovens of our Leisure Rangemaster Gourmet 110 gas cooker was not working properly. I spoke briefly to our excellent CORGI-registered plumber who explained that the flame failure device had gone and needed replacing. Due to the difficulty in obtaining the correct spares, he no longer repairs gas cookers and he advised me to contact the manufacturer, which I did. They wanted £110 for an engineer to call out and £90 for the part. I obtained other quotes for the spare and the cheapest was about £55. All I needed were the instructions on how to fit it. This could be a trial and error job, so watch this crater.

Jenny's birthday on 27th January was eventful only in as much as I attempted a repair on the cooker and littered the kitchen floor with tools and bits from the oven.

It all started well. Too well. I should have known better. Removing the flame sensing device from the inside of the oven was not too difficult and untangling the wire at the back to the gas valve easier still. Here endeth the Lord Mayor's show. The metal feed is (or, rather was, until it broke off) attached to a bolt head with a locking nut, screwed into the underside of the gas valve. Removal of the locking nut was simple enough. Would the bolt come out of the gas valve? No and I spent much of the day trying to figure out how to get it out. Then, thanks to one of the parts suppliers, I discovered that this connection was not supposed to be unscrewed. The flame sensor, copper lead, gas valve and solenoid are sold as a complete unit. No wonder the damn thing is so expensive.

I gave up on that for the time being and went back to experimenting with converting my VHS video tapes to DVD. I discovered that the video recorder I was using was kaput. No wonder all my testing to date has been unsuccessful.

And it's only January.

Rachel arrived back from her brief visit to Norway and her collection from the airport was uneventful, so I won't bother mentioning it.