

Greenmount – January 2014

New Year's Day started early for us.

After watching the live broadcast of the firework display in London, which commenced at midnight, we thought it might be a good idea to go to bed.

Jenny went up first and I tidied up a couple of things on the computer before joining her. While I was preparing to disrobe, the telephone rang. Rachel would be arriving in Bury in about half an hour and wanted a lift home.

Jenny quickly put on her outer garments over her pyjamas and we set off, finally managing to hit the sack the right side of 3 a.m.

We didn't have the luxury of lingering in bed because we had dinner for seven to prepare and my culinary expertise came into play as I helped with the vegetables and, as later events showed, everyone survived the ordeal.

Matthew was first to arrive as I was putting the finishing touches to the new version of village web site, having implemented it the previous afternoon. Carrie arrived shortly afterwards with Marie and Bob and I settled in the lounge, chatting with our guests while Matthew helped his mum in the kitchen to finish off dinner, a task rendered more challenging by a faulty oven.

Those of you who follow these jottings on a regular basis and with a good memory will recall that we purchased a new, double-oven Rangemaster cooker in May 2012 that suffered with a faulty flame failure device on the right-hand oven which was replaced in June 2012. The left-hand oven, hardly used since those early days, seemed to have a similar malfunction, rendering the flattest Yorkshire puddings I had ever seen. Not deterred, Matthew salvaged some by swapping them to the right-hand oven after the meat had been removed.

The result was a pleasant meal enjoyed by all.

On Thursday 2nd January, we went round to the Old School to help prepare for the following day's Collector's Fair. The place was deserted, except for the Karate Class and we were obviously too early. We came back home for lunch, tidied up outside a little, filling the garden waste bin with leaves, ready for collection the following morning and then returned to the Old School for the rest of the afternoon.

Friday 3rd January was our first grocery shopping excursion of the New Year with the usual lunch at Waitrose and a deviation to Asda at Pilsworth on the return journey, where we went in for a single specific item and, amazingly, came out with that and nothing else.

On Saturday 4th January we were round at the Old School, helping with a Collector's Fair. Jenny was helping to sell some good quality bric-a-brac and I was helping Mike and Frank, selling DVDs, CDs and records. After the sale, we helped tidy up before we returned home.

I decided it was time I tidied up my desk and found some mail I should have dealt with days

earlier. I also found my scanner was on its last legs and my printer was running out of ink. I wasn't too good either. I ordered another set of ink cartridges and contemplated having to buy another scanner. As for me....

Sunday 5th January, as always, was the twelfth day of Christmas, the day on which all the decorations are put away for another year. That took us all day.

On Monday 6th January, I attended a breakfast planning meeting of the Greenmount Four at Summerseat Garden Centre to discuss our commencement of the Liverpool to Leeds Canal walk the coming Wednesday.

I was back home for lunch, after which we tackled the new, web-based Online Scout Manager. My first impression was that the software was not very well designed.

In my opinion, Web sites should be uncluttered and intuitive so that they are easy to use and tell you everything you need to know about how to use them. With OSM, as with many web sites, it is not quite as simple as that. In my experience, most web site designers don't think like the people who will be using their site and when it comes to web-based applications, they don't understand the way in which the system is used. To design a web-based application, you have to be using the paper-based system first to understand how it works and how it is used and then you have to appreciate that many of the users may not be computer literate.

On Tuesday 7th January, we finally managed a trip to Sheffield to see Jenny's niece, Tracey and nephew Simon.

On Wednesday 8th January, the Greenmount Four were in Liverpool and at the beginning of our journey to Leeds, along the canal towpath. Apart from three or four locks in the early stages, the rest of the 13½ miles to Maghull was completely flat, on a paved or stone towpath, with hardly any sign of the previous days' heavy rain. Despite the good going and fine weather, I struggled. Being grounded for three months after my ankle injury had taken its toll on my leg muscles and feet and it wasn't long before I was suffering with blisters on both of them. Much of the walk was like walking on coarse sandpaper with bare feet, not something I normally do.

Nevertheless, we reached our destination in a little over six hours, which I thought wasn't bad timing under the circumstances. We found an excellent pub, The Great Mogul, next to the railway station at Maghull and refreshed those parts the beer would reach. It was so nice and comfortable, we decided to have tea there and I hobbled to the station about 6 p.m.

A local train into Liverpool and one stop on the underground brought us back to Lime Street, (with no sign of Maggie May) and the train to Manchester Victoria. Home was a tram and taxi ride away and, after a 7 a.m. start, I was back for about 8:30 p.m.

It was time to deal with my blisters, bursting them and then soaking them in salt water to clean them and harden the fresh skin underneath them, followed by a quick shower.

I awoke on Thursday 9th January with limited mobility, so much so that outrunning a snail

would have been a challenge. Thankfully, my blisters did not hurt but my right ankle did and my leg muscles were stiff. Needless to say, I didn't do much.

Fridays seem to come round all too frequently and here we were again on 10th January rushing off to Unicorn, Waitrose and Asda. We lunched at Waitrose as usual, or at least, I did. Jenny couldn't find anything to suit and she would have settled for a lightly-toasted teacake if there had been any available. Needless to say teacakes were in plentiful supply as we left the table to commence shopping. The stop at Asda on the return journey was as much to replenish our cellar as anything else.

We spent most of Saturday 11th January at the Trafford Centre buying Rachel a birthday present and, naturally, having lunch. Our first choice for the latter was Costa Coffee but, again, Jenny couldn't find anything she liked so we returned to John Lewis, from where we had purchased Rachel a Panasonic blue-ray DVD player with lots of bells and whistles for which it required an Internet connection.

Back home, we took a couple of hours to finish off adding Jenny's Beavers to the new online database.

On Sunday 12th January, Jenny and I went walking with the local Scout Group on a local, short, circular ramble. It was a family affair, designed to get Beavers, Cubs and Scouts and their parents and siblings out and about, giving members of the Scout Active Support an opportunity to campaign for new members. The weather was fine but the frozen ground quickly warmed up and turned to mud, so going was very heavy and dirty. The kids enjoyed the puddles. Over 60 people came along and a good few parents expressed interest in the SAS.

The walk didn't do my ankle much good and to add to my woes, for one reason or another, I ended up with being very sore in a place that made sitting, or, indeed, any sort of movement, very uncomfortable. I suspect the main culprit was the antibiotics I had consumed the previous week. The solution was a quick wash in salt water, a thorough, careful drying and an application of powerful anti-fungal cream. Whether this would resolve the problem before my planned walk on the coming Wednesday remained to be seen.

My aches, pains and discomfort did not prevent us from celebrating Rachel's birthday with a meal at the Heaton Park Beefeater. We had booked the table for 6:30 p.m. and arrived back home at 9:45 p.m.

I had booked in the car for its annual MOT on Monday 13th January, so we drove it up to Tottington Motors, dropped off the car and then caught the bus into Bury for a few odds and ends followed by lunch at Debenhams, returning to collect the car. The original plan had been to join the lads for a breakfast meeting at Summerseat Garden Centre but life is a question of priorities.

Mobile again, it was back to Wilkinsons in Bury where we had seen an ironing board reduced from £23 to £15 and being in desperate need of one, Jenny went in to buy the last one while I parked the car in the car park at Tesco, where else? The ironing board safely placed in the car, we couldn't resist the lure of Tesco and returned home about 4 p.m. wondering where

the day had gone.

Tuesday 14th January also slipped by seemingly in a flash, consumed by a grocery order to Abel and Cole, Beaver Scout preparation, updates to the village web site and the installation of an old Mustek standby scanner that wasn't much better than the failing HP one.

At the end of the day I was still undecided whether to join the other three lads for the second leg of the Leeds Liverpool canal or not, both my feet giving me some discomfort and the weather forecast being somewhat doubtful.

I didn't go walking on Wednesday 15th January and missed out on the second leg of the Liverpool to Leeds walk along the canal tow path. My second leg, or, rather, the big toe on my left foot, was giving me some pain as well as my having to cope with ongoing twinges and aches in my right ankle. The ankle support I had been wearing for the last few days did seem to have helped the latter. The problem with the former is that I have an enlarged bone at the toe joint, otherwise known as a bunion, due, I think, largely to my tendency to kick things with my bare foot. This was not some sort of masochistic ritual, rather my clumsiness, generally stumbling about in bare feet at night, searching for the bathroom in the dark.

On top of my aches and pains, the weather forecast wasn't good, it was dull and dreary and I felt shattered for no particular reason.

Instead we did quite a bit of preparation for the first Beaver session of the New Year.

We went grocery shopping on Thursday 16th January rather than our usual Friday trip because we were expecting the engineer to repair the cooker the following day. Our outward excursion took in the delights of the Old School to drop off some jumble, the post office at Holcombe Brook to tax the car, Bleakholt Animal Sanctuary to deliver some bedding and shredded paper for the comfort of the animals, Unicorn in Chorlton for mainly fruit and vegetables and a few groceries and Waitrose at Broadheath for lunch followed by more groceries and meat. Thankfully, we didn't need to call at Asda or Tesco and all that was after taking in a delivery of groceries and meat from Abel and Cole.

Jenny and Rachel went off to Beavers while I grappled with a PC technical problem and spent £40 upgrading the Cyberlink PowerDVD software on Jenny's laptop to the latest version (13). This is the software I had previously been trying to get out of HP to play blue-ray DVDs. To my surprise, this software also provided DLNA server support, which meant I could use it to stream movies across the network to my TV and I didn't need the Mezzmo software I had installed to do this and for which the trial license had expired.

On Friday 17th January, we started tidying up the garage after the fitting of the new boiler. The main driving force behind this feverish activity was that Jenny had booked a slot for the indoor, table-top sale at Tottington High School the coming Sunday and we needed to sort out what we were taking.

We had only just started when the man arrived to repair the cooker and it didn't take him long to pull it out, disconnect it and find the source of the trouble – a faulty flame failure device, aka the gas valve, for the left-hand oven. It was then he discovered he had brought a

replacement flame failure device for the right-hand oven and, with all the wisdom of the Rangemaster engineering development team, the two were completely different.

A quick trip to his van resulted in the production of three different types of the same piece of equipment. It appeared that Rangemaster had never heard of standardisation or simplicity. True to modern, common manufacturing principles, the objective of design seemed to be to make things as awkward and expensive as possible, using the cheapest, second-rate components available. As luck would have it, one of the three packages retrieved from the van was the device we needed and about half an hour later, we had a fully functional cooker once more. How long it would last was anybody's guess. Apparently, according to the engineer, "we get a lot of these" referring to failing flame failure devices. They obviously live up to their name. Whenever they detect a flame, they fail to work.

Meanwhile, we continued tidying the garage sufficiently to be able to pack the car for the table-top sale on the coming Sunday.

On Saturday 18th January, Jenny and Rachel went to Bury and I just pottered about, as men of my age do.

We were up at 5 a.m. on Sunday 19th January and at Tottington High School unloading our wares by 6:45. We were the first to arrive and picked our spot in the hall. Despite only about half of the tables being taken, trading was steady and we had a very successful morning. We unpacked the car after lunch and put everything away in the garage to await the next sale.

On Monday 20th January I had thought Jenny and I might go to Maghull and walk the 14 miles to Burscough Junction I should have completed the previous Wednesday with the lads. Unfortunately I was far too tired following the previous early start and long day.

Instead, we walked into Ramsbottom, lunched at Bailey's Tea Rooms and toured the charity shops, picking up eight DVDs and two books in the process. We worked off our lunch by walking back home.

Another late night prevented us attempting the Maghull to Burscough Walk on Tuesday 21st January, which I had hoped to do before walking the next leg of the Leeds to Liverpool Canal with the lads, scheduled for the following day.

Instead, we caught up with some Beaver administration work and I struggled to finish the Radio Times Crossword that week, cheating in the end to look up the last few answers. It seemed that my mind was going the way of my body, not that it had far to go.

The alarm went off at 6 a.m. on Wednesday 22nd January and I jumped out of bed, looked outside at the cold, the dark and the wet and jumped back into bed again. The next time I opened my eyes, it was 9:30 and after a shower and pottering about, nearly 11 a.m. before breakfast was over.

By the time we had dealt with yet more E-mail to do with Scouting, washed the pots and I had completed the third and final day's sample for yet another bowel screening, it was turned 1 p.m. How time flies when you're having fun.

I spent most of the afternoon updating my and the village web sites. That was another priority job done.

We had intended to have an early night but the Greenmount Taxi Service was on call and sped out to the Metrolink station in Bury for about 11:45 p.m. to collect a non-paying fare.

We ignored the alarm at 8 a.m. on Thursday 23rd January. It was dull, wet and cold again and warmer and more comfortable where we were. We did manage breakfast about 10 a.m. and that was followed by an unusual flurry of activity, completing yet more Beaver administration work, washing the pots and pulling out the fridge/freezer to clean behind it, one of the remaining tasks for completing the kitchen.

The tall Bosch fridge/freezer sits on a chipboard plinth, levelled at the four corners with packing because the asphalt floor at that point is about as flat as the Snowden Mountain railway. As I may have mentioned before, Bosch appliances do not seem to have much by way of levelling facilities because German builders can manage to produce solid floors level to within a millimetre, whereas British builders seem to deliberately target a slope of one in ten, even on upper floors supported by wooden joists.

But I digress. Removing the said appliance from its plinth was not an easy task and putting it back was even less so.

We had not cleaned behind it since the kitchen was refitted, so you can imagine the sight that greeted us. We just about filled the Dyson with accumulated dirt before washing everything down and throwing away the rags we had used. I think all the spiders managed to escape under the adjacent unit, so no wildlife was injured during the process.

Back at Jenny's laptop, I noticed a message from HP Support Assistant, a piece of software designed to keep the system up to date with software from HP and it had decided it needed to update itself. Needless to say, this process failed badly. Actually, that was not strictly true. It failed spectacularly. The new version would not even install from a manual download and the old version would not uninstall, both generating Error 1316.

My first reaction was to blame HP and to write a letter of complaint to the UK Executive.

After much research, I discovered this was a problem with some sort of corruption in Microsoft Software Installer (MSI). Now there's a surprise. On this occasion, it seemed that not only can Microsoft dig big holes, they can also fill them in again. I managed to find a handy utility on the Microsoft support web site that repaired the fault, removed the old version of the HP software and allowed me to successfully install the update manually. I was so impressed that I documented the solution on this web site in the Technical Tips pages.

I tore up the letter I had written.

We went grocery shopping to Unicorn and Waitrose early on Friday 24th January because Jenny had to be back for Beavers at 5 p.m. Waitrose surpassed itself at lunch time by providing a chicken salad sandwich for Jenny. I finally succumbed to the temptation of a peppery Cornish pasty.

On Saturday 25th January, Jenny went to potter round Bury with Rachel and I spent half the day updating my and the village web sites and the rest of the afternoon watching a second-hand DVD, *The Day After Tomorrow*, an excellent film and a warning to us all. Indeed, I couldn't help comparing the heavy, dark clouds outside with those on the film.

I did manage to find a few minutes to nip out in the cold, once the torrential rain had stopped, to buy Jenny a birthday card for the following day.

We were up just after 9 a.m. on Sunday 26th January, about an hour later than planned, because I had arranged to meet Bill Elkin at the Cricket Club at 10 a.m. to deliver a petrol lawn-mower I confiscated from the jumble sale for the village community and which has been sitting in my garage for a good few months. By 10:15, it was safely parked in the store room at the Cricket Club. On departing, I passed Alistair who was just arriving and we exchanged a few words through open car windows. Since the wind was in my direction, the interior of my vehicle became somewhat damp in the persistent, heavy rain.

Once back home, there was a frenzy of activity as all three of us became embroiled in Beaver work, catching up on administration and preparing for the week's Chinese New Year theme.

The rain did eventually stop and we had clear skies and sunshine for about an hour, until it started to go dark, the sun setting just after 4 p.m. Another front seemed to be moving in and I thought it was too good to last.

Monday 27th January hailed Jenny's 63rd birthday, although most people who meet her think she is in her late forties or early fifties, obviously one of the benefits of spending 41 years with me.

We braved the cloudy front that was moving in and went for a walk across the muddy fields down to Summerseat garden Centre for a snack and, since the light was fading, walked back up the road rather than through the woods. We managed to get back home before the rains came.

On Tuesday 28th January, Jenny went out for lunch with the girls and I stayed in and emptied the dishwasher, listening to CDs of George Formby and 1940s music. Was there no end to the excitement?

We had an 8:30 start on Wednesday 29th January and spent much of the morning, would you believe, on Beaver preparation work for Chinese New Year. A trip to Asda at Pilsworth in the afternoon came as a welcome diversion and it's not often that can be said.

It was back to Chinese New Year preparation on Thursday 30th January and in the evening I had the pleasure of helping with the Beaver session. It was my intention to teach the Beavers to say "Happy New Year" in Mandarin but they time only permitted for me to do so with a small group.

Friday 31st January was grocery shopping day again with lunch at Waitrose in Broadheath, near Altrincham. We were back in time for me to go round to Beavers again. This time, I was only needed to help prepare for the session, as one of the Beaver parents who helped on

a regular basis was born in Bangkok and spoke Mandarin.

And so another month drew to a close and, although the flowers and wildlife seemed to think spring was here due to the recent mild weather, it was still cold, dull, damp and depressing. Was there a sun? If so, would it ever shine again? These and other utterly trivial questions would be answered in the following month's episode of this irresistible saga.