

Greenmount – June 2014

Sunday 1st June saw us heading to Redcar to take Edith, Amy and Tor to visit my other sister, Barbara. What a reunion that was, with Julie, my niece and her husband, Keith, being there as well. Barbara had put on a small, delicious buffet for us all and we had the predictable photo session in her back garden before making our way to our night's residence in Whitby.

We stayed overnight with Jill, the landlady at The Lansbury, 29 Hudson Street and she was as welcoming as ever. The light evening gave us a brief opportunity to show our visitors something of Whitby and to take them to the excellent Duke of York pub on Church Street for our evening meal. There was no sign of Dracula as we returned to retire for the evening.

We parted company with the girls on Monday 2nd June as they went off to explore Whitby and the Abbey, leaving us to potter round the shops. We met up later and had another excellent meal at Moutrey's Italian restaurant on Grape Lane.

Sadly, we had to depart, early, for home on Tuesday 3rd June to allow Amy to take care of some financial arrangements in Bury and so that she and Tor could spend the evening in Manchester with Matthew and Carrie. Jenny, Rachel, Edith and I ate at the Bull's Head in Greenmount, which was not a patch on the establishments in Whitby. Jenny had earlier visited the doctor with a very painful right leg, having pulled the muscle between the knee and the thigh, for which anti-inflammatory and pain-killing tablets had been prescribed.

On Wednesday 4th June we bid our two young travellers farewell on their journey to London and the beginning of their three month European tour. I dropped them at the tram station in Bury in good time to catch their 10 a.m. train from Piccadilly.

Edith visited our village hair salon, Cream and that was the limit of our feverish activity for the day.

By the time of the village meeting I was too tired to go!

We went to Bury on Thursday 5th June in search of a mattress topper for Edith, amongst other essential supplies, largely from Bury Natural Health Store in the market hall.

Marie called round later, after her visit to Cream and had a long chat with Edith.

Friday 6th June was spent grocery shopping at Unicorn and Waitrose, the three of us lunching at the latter.

I went round to help Jenny with Beavers in the evening again, taking two of the Beavers on one side to teach them the Beaver promise from another country (Canada) and how to greet someone in a foreign language (French), to catch up on the remaining two elements of the Global Challenge Badge they had missed the previous week due to absence. I made myself useful by making the juice drink for the Beavers, something for which I was reprimanded, having taken a task away from the designated Parent Helper for the evening. You can't win 'em all.

On Saturday 7th June we went round to the Old School and introduced Edith to a number of people in our community who were attending the monthly “drop-in” and lunch.

We lunched at home and had a trip out to Housing Units of Hollingwood where I ordered two new mattresses for our single beds and Edith looked at mattress toppers. She was not impressed with those particular items but found the department store fascinating.

We had a snack in the very nice restaurant before departing.

Boundary Mill beckoned on Sunday 8th June and we sped off to the end of the M65, eager to secure our 10% discount on any items purchased. Little did we know that later events would show that the prices WITH the 10% discount were comparable with those elsewhere.

While there, we made the mistake of visiting the café. All I can say about it is that it caters for the masses and in so doing makes the feeding of the 5,000 look like a well organised banquet.

Edith was concerned about a scratch on her leg that did not seem to be healing properly, so on Monday 9th June, having failed to arrange an appointment at the local surgery which, according to the receptionist, was too busy concentrating on its registered patients to treat an 86-year-old, British citizen visiting from New Zealand, rather than wait three days for a regular appointment with our overworked, underpaid GPs, we went down to the walk-in centre in Bury. A 30 minute wait resulted in the wound being cleaned and protected with an antiseptic plaster, there being no infection present and a request to return on the coming Friday. The only criticism of the excellent service was that the nurse was very matter of fact and seemed to be under so much pressure that he was rushed and a better patient manner would have been welcome.

After lunch at home, we headed off to Dunelm Mill in search of a mattress topper for Edith. What they had was quite expensive and she decided to sleep on it (or not, as was the case).

Matthew called in after his trip to the dentist on Tuesday 10th June to drop off my Father’s Day present, which Jenny would not let me open until Sunday. He also showed us his cuts and bruises from his stag week end in Birmingham where he had been dressed in riot gear, fighting off zombies and then paint-balling.

After he left, I managed to cut the long grass on the back lawn before it was Jenny’s turn to go for a dental check up and Edith, Rachel and I picked her up afterwards as we sped off to the Trafford Centre in search of a dress for Matthew’s wedding. Several stores and no luck later, we had a mediocre lunch at Debenhams before walking the length of the Centre back to our car, parked near John Lewis, still searching for the elusive outfit. We left empty-handed.

On Wednesday 11th June we went to Bury. Edith needed to call at the bank and then look for a mattress topper on the market. Jenny had a brief look for something to wear for Matthew’s forthcoming wedding. Both of the latter proved fruitless so we retired to the Trackside for a very nice lunch before finishing our expedition in Tesco.

Between the market and Jenny's foray into the most expensive dress shop I have ever visited, I managed to nip into a deserted mobile phone shop and obtain a new Nokia phone for just £6 in as many minutes to replace my old PAYG phone that was falling to bits and which was so old I couldn't obtain batteries for it any more. I felt a certain empathy with it.

After Bury, we headed off to Dunelm Mill in Bolton where Edith had previously seen a memory foam mattress topper and she bought one, together with a light weight duvet.

The day was rounded off with a passable meal at the Bull's Head Toby Carvery. Well, it's local and it's inexpensive. It's a pity it's not better.

On Thursday 12th June we were at the Bull's Head car park for 9:30 a.m. It was not until I contacted Mike to ask him where everyone who was going on the Tottington District Civic Society's trip to Salmsbury Hall was that I learnt we were not gathering until 10 a.m. We joined Mike and Christine at The Old School for the remaining 20 minutes or so of our premature arrival.

The 24 of us set off in our cars, sharing transport to keep the number of vehicles down and we gave Christine a lift, which was fortunate because she was the only one in the car who knew the way. We arrived at Salmsbury Hall, between Preston and Blackburn, before 11 a.m., the time scheduled for the start of our tour of the 14th Century Hall.

Our tour started in the main hall and was unusual in that we were seated while the history of the building was related to us by a young lady, dressed and made up as a servant wench and part-time witch of the time, in a very entertaining and humorous way, with audience participation, something for which some of those chosen were not prepared. Words cannot describe the excellent presentation; it has to be experienced in person, something I strongly recommend, although, I assume such a treat is reserved for parties like ours.

The entertainment continued into the parlour and the chapel, after which we adjourned for lunch and, following the usual group photograph on the lawn in the lovely and most welcome June sunshine, we all went our separate ways to explore the building and grounds.

We left at about 3 p.m., having observed a limited edition Aston Martin worth an estimated £400,000, for which the annual road tax was over £1,000, in the car park. How an individual can be allowed to amass so much wealth as to be so extravagant in a world in which children are dying from lack of hygiene, medicine, food, sanitation and clean water is utterly beyond my comprehension.

Having dropped off Jenny and Edith at home, I walked round with Christine to her home to fix a minor problem on her computer and walked back home for a light tea after a most enjoyable day.

Another week had gone by so quickly and our weekly shopping day had arrived again on Friday 13th June, the first port of call being the walk-in centre in Bury with Edith's leg. We took the rest of her as well. On this occasion, an element of infection was found to have crept into the tissue surrounding the wound. Her leg was re-dressed and she was given a course of antibiotics.

An hour later we were on our way to Unicorn and Waitrose in Broadheath, lunching at the latter as usual and arriving back home just after 4 p.m. with Jenny scheduled to start her Beaver session at 5 p.m. That didn't leave her much time to put away the groceries, have a cup of tea and pack her bag of bits for the Beavers.

Jenny was back with her Beavers in the afternoon of Saturday 14th June for the John Gibson Challenge Fun Day, where Colonies from the District competed for the John Gibson Trophy on the field at the Canon Lewis Hall on Longsite Road. The combined three Greenmount Beaver Colonies came second this year, Jenny's Friday Colony having won it last year, the first year the contest was held.

Meanwhile, I had intended to do some gardening and I did finally manage to cut the grass on the back lawn and trim the edges this time before the rains came, finishing just after Jenny arrived back home.

There were several distractions throughout the day that prevented me making a start. Jenny had asked me to make her a sign for Greenmount Beavers for the Fun Day and that took about an hour of sawing, screwing and banging. Lucky me.

Then I spent a good hour and a half hunting for the spacers to adjust the height of the blade on the lawn mower. I gave up in the end and cut the grass without, using the existing setting on the mower.

After that, Edith wanted some help with accessing the Internet, which was easier than cutting the grass.

Sunday 15th June was a lazy day, spent at home and it gave me an opportunity to do a little gardening, little being the operative word. I started to clean the moss and other weeds off the patio block paving using a long-handled wire brush. It was a bit quicker than last year's attempt on my hands and knees but I only managed the first few square metres of it at this attempt.

Most of Monday 16th June was spent in Ramsbottom, pottering around the charity and clothing shops, Jenny still searching for that elusive wedding outfit, without success. We consoled ourselves with a late lunch at Summerseat Garden Centre, after which it was a little late in the day to go on to Bolton as we had planned, so I decided to leave that until the following day.

Tuesday 17th June hailed another visit with Edith to the walk in centre in Bury and the wound on her leg was healing, slowly.

That was followed by my trip to the dentist for a check up and, my teeth being as well as could be expected after 67 years of maltreatment, I escaped with a clean and polish.

A lunch of scrambled egg and beans on toast at home was succeeded by yet another trip out, this time to Bolton, the prime objective being to try my outfit for Matthew's wedding.

We went to Sheffield Meadowhall shopping mall on Wednesday 18th June and following a large, slow tanker full of sugar most of the way over the Woodhead Pass did little to sweeten our journey of about two hours. Jenny did manage to find that elusive wedding

outfit at Jacques Vert All but one of the dresses I had found on the Internet at House of Fraser being unavailable in store. A fat lot of use that was. Dresses need to be tried on and you can't do that in hyperspace, something the managers of clothing shops seem to have difficulty in grasping. The dress in Jacques Vert was not unreasonably priced, being in the sale. I wish I could have said the same for the extortionately-priced accessories, for which I contemplated re-mortgaging the house. I couldn't help wondering how much the poor soul, probably in China, who made these things, actually got out of it.

As an aside, has it occurred to anyone out there that, while the EU is trying to find ways of reducing our carbon emissions and thereby reduce the effects of global warming, we and other European countries are merrily importing manufactured goods by the shipload from China, the biggest carbon emitter in the world? In so doing we are fuelling global warming, helping our ice caps to melt and pushing up sea levels, not to mention altering the world's weather patterns. You, of course, can help to stop it. Simply don't buy anything made in China.

Back to the plot. After pottering round the mall, we went to see Jenny's brother, Wilf and his wife, Anne and their two sons, Barry and Adam. Adam was cutting the long grass at the top of the back garden when we arrived and had just literally stumbled across a dead fox. It wasn't long before he found a second, somewhat emaciated. Boom, boom.

We left about 6:30 and headed for the Beefeater at Heaton Park where we had a very good meal before returning home for a cup of tea to round off the very pleasant and warm day.

We had another relaxing day on Thursday 19th June. Jenny and I sped off to collect the pond dipping equipment for the Beavers from the Rangers at Burrs Country Park at 10:30 and we had a quick snack on returning before Jenny went off to have her hair coloured and cut or vice versa at Cream at 1 p.m.

I took Edith round to the other hair salon in the village, Lisa Chestney, to have her hair washed and blow-waved, whatever that means, at 2 p.m.

Both looked good when they returned and Rachel arrived to have her hair coloured and cut at Cream too.

Hair today, gone tomorrow.

I spent my time in more useful exploits, continuing to clear the weeds from the patio and, to round off my day, removing and relaying part of the patio that had formed a bit of a dip in which a pool of water collected when it rained. To be fair, the dip had not appeared of its own accord but was more as a result of me chopping logs on it. The end result was a patio that looked as though it didn't have a dip in it. Time and rain would tell.

Friday 20th June was shopping day and I got to drive down to Unicorn in Chrolton and Waitrose in Broadheath along the dreaded M60 anticlockwise from Prestwich and A56 between Stretford and Broadheath amidst drivers who would be more at home in dodgem cars at the fairground. Our traffic police are, of course, wonderful, when you can find one, thanks to the funding cuts.

The choice for lunch at Waitrose in Broadheath was as sparse as usual and what's more, three organic lines we usually purchase had disappeared from the shelves, namely organic bread sticks, Nice 'n' Nobly Granola and Doves Farm Cornflour. The fish counter rarely stocks the Fish of the Week advertised in the Waitrose magazine. Last week it was halibut and they had plenty. This week they didn't have any. On top of that, the number of MSC fish lines seems to have diminished.

It looked like Waitrose was beginning to forsake quality for profit and seemed to be going the same way as Tesco and Asda. Thank goodness for Unicorn.

Jenny went off to a pond dipping session with her Beavers while I finally caught up with some administration work.

The first stop on Saturday 21st June was at the local shops in the village followed by a trip to the walk-in centre in Bury for Edith and then a little shopping. Unfortunately, we did not have time to stay in Bury for the Bandemonium event, with several bands playing throughout the afternoon in various locations.

After lunch, Jenny hung out the washing and the line broke for the fourth time, at which point I took it down and threw it in the bin. Jenny recovered her washing from the floor, dusted it down and put it on a clothes rack to dry outside as a temporary measure until we could purchase a new line. The mistake was leaving the line out all winter instead of fetching it in after each use. We live, learn and launder.

I caught up on some administration work again and then decided to resume the patio cleaning, generating more dust for the washing.

I spent most of Sunday 22nd June outside in the lovely warm sunshine, cleaning the block paving and managed to complete the passageway at the side of the house before collapsing in the old patio chair with a well-earned beer. Note the important order of collapsing before the beer and not as a result of it.

A brief trip into Ramsbottom on Monday 23rd June to purchase a new washing line, the old one having completely perished as a result of being left out in all weathers, was followed by a variation on a theme. I turned my attention to cutting the front lawn. I use the descriptive term loosely, the grass being more than ankle deep, due partly to the atrociously wet spring and my attention being directed to other tasks outside. While I was busy mowing away, the two ladies (Jenny and Edith) popped round to the local beauty salon. Some people have all the fun.

The lawn cut and strimmed, I trimmed the hedge that divides our lawn from that next door, finding time in there somewhere to go with Jenny to return the pond dipping equipment she had borrowed for her Beavers from the rangers. We called at Tottington library, above which our local police community support officers are stationed, having failed to find anyone in at the police station in Ramsbottom earlier in the day. There was no-one there either. I wondered whether these people were a figment of my imagination.

We made a further detour to the physiotherapist on the way home to change Edith's appointment. Then it was back to the front garden and I managed to clean about a third of the block paving at the front of the house before giving up for the day and a quick shower to remove all the dust and grime.

During Edith's last visit to the walk-in centre in Bury, she had been told to arrange an appointment at the treatment centre at Tottington Health Centre so she could have her leg wound dressed there twice a week instead of going to the walk-in centre, which would be more convenient for all concerned. That was easier said than done.

I telephoned the medical centre only to be told I had to telephone a central booking number. It took several attempts to raise someone there after leaving the phone to ring for nearly two minutes each time before it cut off. When I did finally speak to a young lady, we went through the arrangements and she finally found a free appointment in about three weeks' time. Then she asked me for Edith's GP. I explained she didn't have one, only having arrived from New Zealand at the end of May and I was told she could not book an appointment at the treatment centre until she had registered with a GP.

Jenny and Edith went round to the local surgery in Greenmount and were told Edith would need to speak to the practice manager who was not in until the following day.

I sent a message to the Department of Health, which, under the circumstances, was quite polite.

On Tuesday 24th June, the local surgery telephoned for Edith to tell her she would have to register with the walk-in centre. "Was this Catch 22?" I thought.

We had to go down to the walk-in centre for Edith's leg to be dressed again and Jenny and Edith made enquiries about registering with the doctor there. Not only was that not an option but there was a long wait due to the number of patients in the queue before her. Edith was advised to visit the medical practice on the third floor in the mean time.

A trip up two flights of stairs yielded a modicum of success in that Edith was given several forms to complete for registration with a GP and we whiled away the time, or at least the first hour of it, entering information in the boxes provided. Unfortunately, Edith said she had forgotten her passport so we could not return the forms while we were there. Needless to say, she found her passport in her handbag some hours later.

Edith was finally called into the consulting room after about a two hour wait and she was out within 15 minutes with her leg redressed, the good news being that it was healing, albeit slowly, a couple of replacement dressings for self-administration, and a prescription for even more dressings should she require them and some E45 cream for her dry skin.

After that, we went for a nice lunch at Leckenby's in the Millgate shopping precinct in Bury and then nipped into a charity shop, where Edith bought a top and Jenny bought a skirt, on the way to the Tourist Information office, where Edith was hoping to obtain some postcards of Bury. Unfortunately, time was running out for the car park and we never made it to the latter. I dashed off in the unscheduled downpour to collect the car and picked up my two passengers at the Bury Parish Church on the end of The Rock.

Our final destination for the day was Asda at Pilsworth for yet more essential supplies, including wine and a pizza for my tea. We detoured to Matthew and Carrie's house on the way home to show Edith where they lived. Back home, the cats were waiting impatiently for their tea.

On Wednesday 25th June we all went off to Bygone Times via Chorley, thereby taking the scenic route. The purpose of our visit to Chorley was to call at a health food shop from which Edith could purchase some natural health remedies she took regularly in NZ and which were not available in Bury. Now, there's a surprise. While we were there, we managed to find a bottle of Granovita, organic, brown sauce, something else that is not currently available in Bury. It might have a world-famous market but it's damned short of organic produce.

For Jenny and I, the trip to Bygone Times was fruitless, not finding anything we needed, although it was always an interesting place just to visit and the new, small war museum in the basement was excellent and well worth seeing. It was a pity I did not have my camera with me. Edith made a couple of purchases and she was astounded at the size of the place and the variety of goods on offer. Sadly, she could not manage the stairs to the war museum, which, having lived through the second world-war, she would have found very interesting.

We had a day at home on Thursday 27th June, Edith having appointments with the physiotherapist and the chiropodist. I didn't feel too well, with a bit of a tummy bug in the morning and settled down to more computer work for most of the day.

By Friday 28th June my bug had moved on and it was Jenny's turn to suffer, so the weekly shop was given a miss. Instead, I drove down to Manchester to collect Jenny's brother, Wilf and his wife, Anne as they stepped off the train from Sheffield and ferried them to The Village hotel in Bury, where they were staying a couple of nights for Matthew's wedding. Then I took Edith to the walk-in centre in Bury to hand in her GP registration forms.

I reflected that I should take up taxi-driving. Further reading will add substance to my thoughts.

I collected Wilf and Anne in the evening to take them to the Red Hall for a meal with Rachel, Jenny and Edith who had come up by a more direct route from home, courtesy of Rachel and also with Rebecca (Jenny's eldest sister's granddaughter) and her husband, Graham, who were staying for the week end at The Red Hall. I had booked the table for the family gathering on the eve of Matthew's wedding and it turned out to be a most enjoyable occasion. I dropped Anne and Wilf back at their hotel on my way home.

Back home, Jenny's tummy bug had taken a firm hold and she was not at all well. Still, she managed to prepare for the wedding on Saturday 28th June and, after my sheepdog performance, I managed to get everyone together and at the Red Hall for noon.

Matthew's and Carrie's wedding went very well and it was an emotional experience, bringing back many memories.

The speeches afterwards were most entertaining, particularly that from the best man, Rash, one of Matthew's work colleagues.

After the very good meal, we had an opportunity to play roulette and/or blackjack, just for fun. Jenny and I came home to feed the cats.

We were back at the hotel for the evening dance and buffet and, following the first dance performed by the bride and groom, it was the turn of the parents. Learning the steps of the waltz and putting them into practice, I found, were two completely different things and we just about managed to shuffle round the dance floor without falling over each other.

Rash and the Bridesman, Glen, performed the most amazing, improvised routine on the dance floor I had ever seen and during the evening several people remarked this was the best wedding they had ever attended.

Unfortunately, Jenny's illness got the better of her by 10 p.m. and we both retired, leaving the rest of the revellers to enjoy themselves into the early hours.

We came home after breakfast on Sunday 29th June, Jenny feeling a little better after a good night's sleep and some medication recommended by the pharmacist the previous day.

Barbara, my sister and John, her elder son and his wife Jane came back to our house to collect Edith and her belongings to take her up to Redcar to spend some time with Barbara.

Matthew and Carrie called round to collect the suit they had hired for me to save us returning it and to see how Jenny was.

We spent the day resting and Jenny slept for most of the afternoon.

Another good night's rest saw more improvement in Jenny's discomfort and on Monday 30th June Jenny, Rachel and I went to Bury to do a little grocery shopping, the fridge being empty.

Afterwards, I caught up on yet more computer administration work.

That just about brought an end to yet another fun-packed month with lots left to do during July 2014. Will the block paving cleaning ever be finished? Will Edith return from Redcar? Does tomorrow ever come? These and other insignificant trivia are just a few questions that will be completely ignored in the next thrilling instalment of this epic drama of life in Greenmount.