

Greenmount March 2011

For the latter part of February, into the first few days of March, I was suffering from, as opposed to being, a pain in the bum. I have no idea what caused this and I do not normally have a problem, at least, not one like this. It almost drove me to visit my G.P., which gives you some idea of its severity. Thankfully, certain over-the-counter remedies, various herbal preparations, a diet with increased roughage and drinking more (water, that is) seemed to improve matters.

Despite my affliction, the fine, but cold, weather drew us out into the garden on 1st March. There was much to do after such a long, cold winter and I removed three buckets of cat droppings from the back garden borders. The cats obviously did not have the problem I did.

After all the fresh air on Tuesday, Jenny was suffering from supermarket withdrawal symptoms by Wednesday and we took a trip to Asda at Pillsworth.

I had heard or read somewhere that Walmart is supposed to be moving, in the next few months, to fish suppliers approved by the Marine Stewardship Council. Asda, being owned by Walmart, encouraged us to check out the fish counter. There was no evidence of the MSC presence. In fact, the information labelling on the fish source was less informative than that at Tesco – and that's saying something.

Thursday 3rd March was a more productive day. We commenced with preparations for the evening's Beaver meeting, after which I thought it was time I started sawing up the logs I have been storing under the car port since last autumn. This was a sort of "filler" job while I was waiting for Matthew to arrive.

I had arranged to take some rubbish to the refuse dump in Bury for Matthew and I needed help to extract the trailer from underneath all the car boot stock in the garage. Matthew had been clearing his garden to make room for a large greenhouse and the result was two runs to the tip, once we found the trailer.

Friday 4th March was the usual shopping day. Oh boy.

Jenny went to the Friday Beaver meeting to provide the authority to run it, the existing leaders not having been trained and not holding a warrant.

Prior to the last Group Scout Leader's meeting, Jenny had been asked to take over the running of the Friday session, in addition to continuing to run the Thursday Colony. Her decision to take on this additional challenge has not met with overwhelming enthusiasm from a certain quarter, the result being that the existing leaders are resigning after Easter, when Jenny will be taking over.

So that's two hours a week, is it?

The 5th March, being the first Saturday of the month, was the book sale and exchange at the Old School and Jenny decided to go round. I joined her and we ended up helping to sort more jumble in preparation for the next sale. We left just before lunch-time to deliver the latest issue of the community newsletter to houses in Brookside Crescent and Greenside Drive before returning home to refuel. I spent the afternoon in more relaxed

mood, updating the village web site and the web site for Tottington District Civic Society.

On Sunday 6th March, I spent the day helping Matthew prepare the base for his greenhouse while Jenny went to Church Parade with her Beavers (only eight turned up this month) and then went to Bury with Rachel.

On Monday 7th March, Jenny went off to lunch with her friend, Karen while I carried on with the chores at home. Following that, she had a meeting with Christine Taylor and others to discuss plans for the 'Teddy Bear's Picnic at the coming Big Village Party on 2nd May (see www.greenmountvillage.org.uk and the latest village Newsletter under Progress for more details).

If this continues, I'm going to have to ask her for ID when she comes into the house.

After all this vibrant activity, there was a lull in our exciting lifestyle and we settled down to more routine tasks for a short while, until 11th March, when Jenny had agreed that we would cook for the Scouts at the Training Centre in Middleton on the Saturday and Sunday, catering for about fifteen people. That is, Jenny cooked and, in a rare change of roles, I was the gofer. This is the second time we have risen to this challenge and our encore was by popular request.

On Thursday 17th March, having two vouchers to spend at Summerseat Garden Centre, one for a free pot of tea when one was purchased and the other for a £1 off any purchase, we walked down for lunch and, afterwards, bought ourselves a wild garlic plant for £1.19, costing us just 19 p. When we arrived back home, we found the postman had delivered yet more offers!

In the evening, after Beavers, we made our way, by the light of the moon, across the golf course to the clubhouse for the Village Community Meeting. There was a recap of forthcoming events followed by a discussion about the Big Village Party on 2nd May. Jenny and I were hoping to we could resurrect the Maypole but the local primary school is unable to perform for us for various reasons and the old Maypole we have in the Old School is very much in need of renovation, so I don't think it is an option for this year. Jenny thinks we should reinstate the old May Day traditions, including the choosing of a May Queen (for those born before these enlightened times, that is, of the female variety).

Personally, I would like to see the village have some Morris Dancers but I think that might be a little too ambitious. Besides, we can't find anyone called Morris to dance on.

On 18th March, while undertaking the weekly shop, we lunched again at Costa Coffee in Tesco's Supermarket at Prestwich. This is getting to be a habit.

On Saturday 19th March we donned our working clothes and set off to help tidy up the village for a couple of hours, soaking in the vitamin D, followed by tea, biscuits and all the latest village gossip at The Old School. I took my camera and the incriminating evidence is on the village web site.

After lunch, I had planned to go down to help Matthew with the erection of his greenhouse but he telephoned me to say he had built the two ends but was not ready to assemble the sides yet. It was bit draughty.

On Sunday 20th March we went to visit relatives in Sheffield and Jenny spent the day with her niece, Tracey, while I went up to see my sister, Barbara. Her son, John and his wife, Jane, arrived and we spent the afternoon putting the world to rights. We were doing a better job than the UN.

Needless to say, we arrived back with yet more car boot stock. We don't need a garage. We need a Tardis.

We stopped at the Heaton Park Beefeater on the way back for a most enjoyable meal, served by a very pleasant waitress called Jackie, who has attended us a few times before and who remembered us. Once seen, never forgotten.

The following day saw the start of an unusually warm and dry spell with lots of sunshine and we spent much of the time tidying up the garden, punctuated with a visit to the doctor with my sore bum. Apparently I had a fungal infection that required some cream with an anti-inflammatory component, a fungicide and, last but not least, hydrocortisone. Since the steroid agent is not good for the skin, especially in sensitive areas, its use was not recommended for more than seven days. In fact, I wasn't too happy about using it at all but since all other avenues had been explored, in a manner of speaking, and there was no improvement by the following Thursday, I decided to commence treatment. There was a marked improvement within a couple of days and the problem seemed to be almost resolved within a week, when I was able to sit down again.

Meanwhile, I decided to clean out the gutters and made a start on Tuesday, spending most of the day on the garage and kitchen extension roof, trying not to fall off. The box gutter between the kitchen extension and the conservatory was so full of sediment that it had formed its own little microcosm, full of insects, worms, spiders and it was even sporting two plants and the beginnings of a tree. Amongst all this gunk were three of the plastic edgings off the conservatory roof panes, along the kitchen extension side and I had to extract these so that Jenny could clean them (she gets all the good jobs) ready for refitting.

Cleaning out this section of gutter and refitting the edgings required me to lay on my front with my head down the gutter and my feet pointing towards the roof apex. I performed this amazing feat without any appliance or a safety net.

All this lively activity was punctuated with lunch on the patio in the sunshine – the first (and, knowing our weather, the last?) this year.

More gardening and a second lunch outside followed on Wednesday 23rd March, two in a row being something of a record.

Thursday 24th March was a more relaxed day, at least, for some. After preparing for the evening's Beaver meeting, I pottered about in my usual relaxed, casual manner while Jenny reduced her mountain of ironing to a molehill.

Friday 25th March brought fresh challenges. I had left my computer on overnight to record a radio programme at 8 a.m. on Friday, knowing that we probably would not be up in time to switch it on early enough in the morning. I was right.

The computer was exceedingly quiet and it took me ten minutes to discover it had no power and further attempts to resuscitate it failed with a loud bang and a smell of burning. It took a further twenty minutes to place the computer on its side on the dining room table and remove its power supply. I obviously needed a new one but food being higher on my priority list, we went to perform the usual weekly shop, lunching once again at Costa Coffee in the Tesco Supermarket at Prestwich.

We returned home about 3 p.m. just long enough to unload the groceries and set off to Scan in Bolton for spare computer parts. The three year warranty on my existing power supply had expired by over a year and I purchased a new, modular one (a modular power supply is one where you only plug in the power cables you need as opposed to having cables you don't want dangling about inside the computer) for about £65. I also took the opportunity to obtain a five-port, high-speed, USB PCI-card to give me additional USB connections, a bargain at £7.

It took me about half an hour to install the new power supply and persuade the computer to burst back into life, leaving it to run a full virus check, still on the dining room table, much to Jenny's joy. I didn't feel like messing with it after tea and a bottle of wine, so I left it for a more convenient and sober time.

On Saturday 26th March, I went down to help Matthew build his greenhouse and we made significant progress, finishing it off the following day. I don't think we shall have to go all the way to Chorlton for our veg this summer.

In the evening of the 26th, we went to the village Barn Dance at the Old School. I'm not normally one for dancing but this was good fun and we really enjoyed it. I found a couple of the dances a little complicated in as much as I had difficulty in remembering the steps. Still, when one has the majority of 80 or so people making idiots of themselves, one feels one is in good company. The band was called The Quiet Man, which was something of a misnomer in that there was more than one of them and they were quite loud, although not unpleasantly so.

I was back at Matthew's house on the Sunday and we finished off the greenhouse. All it needs now are some benches and plants. Meanwhile, Matthew and Carrie are using it as a conservatory.

On returning, I repositioned my computer on my desk in the conservatory and connected it up to all its bits and pieces, giving Jenny her dining room table back.

On Monday 28th March, we walked into Ramsbottom to do some banking, one of those rare occasions when we deposited more than we withdrew.

Tuesday 29th was yet another fine day and after a chilly start, it turned quite warm with some sunshine. I cut all the grass and fed the lawn at the back, while Jenny went off to Yoga, before collapsing in the chair.

Our voting papers arrived for May 5th. This is a referendum, asking the question:

“At present, the UK uses the 'first past the post' system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. Should the 'alternative vote' system be used instead?”

Any system that takes more of the votes cast into account is more representative of the wishes of the people and is thus more democratic. The answer to the question has to be “Yes”. Not that it will make a lot of difference.

The first assumption is that those elected to govern actually run the country. They don't. They only appear to do so. The power and direction of our politics lies with faceless, rich and influential people, many of whom do not even live in this country.

The second assumption is that decisions are taken in the best interests of the people. They are not. Decisions are, for the most part, taken in the best interests of those who benefit most financially irrespective of the consequences to the general public or to generations to come.

That law enforcement is steadily being given increasing powers to deal with and detain peaceful protesters and individuals are given protection when protesters are injured or killed is indicative of a worrying trend that started well before Thatcher's confrontation with the miners.

The number of politicians with integrity has steadily decreased (for example Cash for Questions, Expense Fraud) and those who do maintain their principles never reach positions of influence or responsibility.

The one saving grace of this proposed new system is that the minority parties will gain seats and have more of a voice. This is a double-edged sword in that, while parties, like the Green Party, that strive for a sustainable future to benefit all, will increase their representation, so will extremist and divisive parties.

Not only do we need to change the voting system. The voting public needs to wake up to reality and remove from power the greedy and selfish members of parliament who put themselves and their associates first. If you want your grandchildren to have a future, when you have the opportunity to do so, vote for a party that will give them one – before it's too late.

That was a party political statement from the Good Sense Party.

On Wednesday 30th we went to see Jenny's friend, Karen. She was having problems with her computer and I said I would go round and look at it. Some bits of Windows XP appeared to be missing and diagnostics failed to reveal the underlying cause. I left it finishing a disc check and told Karen to log in when it had finished and install the pending XP update – Service Pack 3. That should have kept her busy for a few hours.

Karen telephoned later and matters had migrated from bad to worse with the desktop failing to load even in Safe Mode. It was time for a Windows reload, I thought. The plan was for Karen to drop off the computer the following morning for me to fix it over the coming few days.

Meanwhile, I drove Jenny up to the Pack Horse Inn at Affetside for her Scout Leaders Meeting to discuss plans for the Scout Camp. Mike came up with us and he and I sat in the bar putting the world to rights yet again. After the meeting, we joined the Scout Leaders for a general chat and several more rounds of drinks, finally crawling back to the car at about 1 a.m. Fortunately Jenny had only been consuming light refreshments and

was able to drive home. A cup of tea to round off the day saw us flop into bed about 2 a.m.

We were up about 9 a.m., not feeling as bad as I had expected, in time for Karen to arrive, which she didn't. She telephoned instead to say that her husband, Nick, had taken the computer to PC World and they had inserted the recovery disc. By this time, I could have done with something similar.

After lunch, feeling a little more energetic, I decided to have another look at the bathroom sink drain. It's just the sort of thing you do on your wedding anniversary.

I had decided the blockage, causing the sink to empty very slowly, must be due to the slope of the waste pipe (or lack of it) in the kitchen extension loft and I decided to remove a brick or two in the outside wall to increase the fall. I did this carefully, so as not to damage the waste pipes and an hour or so later, I was able to test the new arrangement.

Not only did that not fix the problem, it created another one. The collar on the main down pipe into which this drain pipe connects has come away from the down pipe at the bottom of the connection and now leaks waste water down the outside of the main sewer pipe. It seems that the collar was not fixed properly to the drain pipe when it was installed. I think this is the original waste pipe connection from the old sink, installed when the house was built so I can't really blame the bathroom fitter, not that it would do any good.

So the blockage must be elsewhere, I thought. I dismantled the waste pipe under the sink and thoroughly cleaned the trap, removing lots of black, smelly substance while trying to keep my lunch down. By this time, I was getting through disinfectant by the gallon and latex gloves by the gross.

That didn't solve the problem either. I am now of the opinion that the blockage is in the inaccessible length of pipe, tucked neatly away behind the fitted units in the bathroom.

My next plan of action is to try to rod the pipe from the outside using some time of brush on the end of the rods to scrub the inside of the pipe while water is running down it from the sink, hopefully catching the waste gunk in a bucket. I hope to be able to publish the photos next month. First, I need it to stop raining first.

Meanwhile, I have a large hole in the brickwork packed with old carrier bags and no plan as yet for dealing with the cracked drain collar.

Any suggestions, preferably pertaining to my drain problem, other than "telephone a plumber" and "use drain cleaning solution" would be greatly appreciated. I have telephoned my plumber. He's not interested. I can't say I blame him. I have also tried some drain cleaning solution and its effect is only temporary and short-lived. Alcohol makes the problem go away, if I drink enough of it, but that solution's only temporary as well.