

Greenmount March 2012

Thursday 1st March was NHS day – at least, it was for us.

I rose at 6 a.m., having had about three hours' sleep on the settee in the lounge. No, Jenny and I had not had a disagreement. Being the chivalrous and modest person that I am, I volunteered to sleep downstairs to avoid keeping Jenny awake with my coughing. I kept the cats awake instead.

We had to ferry Rachel to Rochdale Infirmary for 8 a.m. to have three wisdom teeth removed under general anaesthetic. We had to pass Bury Tesco and on the return journey Jenny could not let this opportunity go amiss.

We made a second stop at the medical centre in Greenmount and I was able to see a doctor almost straight away. The brief wait I had I spent in the car. The receptionist didn't want me in the waiting room in case I made the other patients ill. The doctor examined my lungs and agreed with me, or to be more precise, our local St. John Ambulance lady, Faith, that my lungs were clear and that I had an upper respiratory infection.

The doctor (not the one with which I am registered – you have to book appointments with him a week in advance, which is a bit difficult if your crystal ball isn't working) deduced the offending infestation was viral and not bacterial so the likelihood of antibiotics being of any practical use was nil. He advised some Sudafed cough medicine and some Olbas Oil, used in hot water as an inhalant before retiring. Both items I could purchase over the counter at the chemist, if I weren't driving. Jenny collected them instead. The doctor did also offer to write me a prescription for some antibiotics in case the medicine and inhalant did not work and I said I would get back to him on Monday if I needed them.

On returning home, I took a dose of the medicine, which did seem to help. The dosage of two 5 ml spoonfuls (or one 10 ml spoonful) can be taken every four to six hours and no more than four doses can be taken in 24 hours. So if it's taken at less than six hour intervals, how does that work? Whoever wrote the instructions obviously didn't have a GCSE in maths.

We hadn't been in long when the hospital rang to say we could collect Rachel, so we retraced our tyre tracks to Rochdale and back, without the deviations and distractions.

We had expected Rachel to be unable to move her jaw and therefore unable to speak for a couple of quiet, peaceful days. She proved this prediction wrong the moment she got in the car with graphic descriptions of the hospital procedures. I was actually quite pleased she was not as incapacitated as we had expected.

Our normal Friday routine was disrupted on 2nd March, my catarrh and general poor condition still rendering me inactive and Rachel spending most of the day recovering in bed. Jenny had to brave Tesco in Bury on her own, while I had to muster enough strength to take Rachel's car into the garage in Tootington for some suspension work, walking back on what, under normal circumstances, would have been a very pleasant morning. Needless to say, I also had to go up and collect the car when it was ready.

Not content with having spent the two previous evenings at Beaver meetings, Jenny went off to a Beaver Fun Day at Shuttleworth (about 15 minutes' drive away, across the valley) on Saturday 3rd March with fourteen of her Beavers, leaving the invalids to continue their slow recovery in peace and quiet. Had one or both of us been well enough, we would have been seconded to help.

These days, most people have running water in their kitchen, but not from the ceiling. This was the scene that greeted Jenny on her return, Rachel having alerted me to this unusual feature earlier. I had investigated the problem in the loft above the kitchen extension, accessed with great difficulty and a good deal of contortion from the garage loft and discovered that the junction in the waste water pipe where the bathroom sink and bidet outlets meet had been depressed such that the sink connection was almost touching the upper surface of the plasterboard ceiling, causing it to leak.

What had caused this, I had no idea. It looked like some large creature had found its way into this void and thrown its weight about, although I can't imagine how or when.

The repair necessitated my crawling into the roof space through a small hole in the wall, over the main toilet waste pipe, the kind of manoeuvre for which my portly frame was not built even on that rarest of occasions when it is in a serviceable condition. This I managed with some difficulty and a few choice expletives and it was then a simple matter of dismantling the T-junction while balancing on the joists and whistling Dixie. TV talent shows, here I come.

To say the inside of the T-piece was unclean is an understatement and I decided to take it down to the kitchen and wash it with disinfectant and anti-bacterial spray before removing the rubber seal in the connection for the bathroom sink which had become lodged inside (the seal, not the bathroom sink).

Exiting from the compact space in reverse required a technique of which Houdini would have been envious, had he still been with us.

Having washed the T-piece and recovered the rubber seal, I repeated my earlier foray into the glory hole to replace it and, with the aid of Jenny and the intercom facility on our wireless telephone handsets (I knew it would come in useful, one day) tested the waste outlets from the sink and bidet. There was no sign of a leak and it appears, for once, my efforts had been successful. Not wishing to tempt fate, my last, preventative, measure was to place an old washing-up bowl under the T-piece, just in case, with the intention of checking it at regular intervals.

On Sunday 4th March, I spent the day recovering from the previous day's experience.

On Monday 5th March, Jenny and I went into Ramsbottom for Jenny's piano lesson and to do some grocery shopping. Rachel remained in bed in agony or, alternatively, in agony, in bed.

The piano lesson was cancelled, due to Jenny's teacher being unavailable and we toured the charity shops, looking for bargains, instead. Jenny found a couple of books.

The grocery expedition yielded little fruit, or vegetables, since none of the local stores (Tesco and Morrisons) stock much in the organic line.

On Wednesday 7th March, it was such a nice day that we started to revive the garden and potted plants on the patio. Jenny managed to tidy up and feed about half of the plants in the pots and I managed to clear two tubs full of cat do-dos from a small section of the garden border before the rains came.

On Friday 9th March we went grocery shopping as usual and managed to spend considerably more at Unicorn than Tesco Prestwich and Asda Pillsworth combined, something of a first for us and a triumph for organic producers and fair traders. It seems that neither Asda nor Tesco have heard this is Fair Trade Fortnight in Manchester.

We arrived back home to an entrance hall full of post and a Jazz CD of Artie Shaw, wrapped in The Watchtower, courtesy of Donald, our very nice, regular, religious visitor.

Being not at my best at the moment, I have been occupying my time sorting through and cataloguing my CD collection and converting Cassette Tapes and LPs to CDs and I have now reached the Bs, currently working on Sidney Bechet and Bix Beiderbecke. This is very time-consuming, as I am listening to all my CDs and I am enjoying every minute of it.

I have, unfortunately, run out of CD labels and when I came to order more, I discovered that the Avery jewel case labels I use have been discontinued. I did find some alternatives on Amazon and I was about to place an order for these and some labels for the CDs themselves when I discovered that each of the two items (four packs of jewel case labels from one company and one pack of CD labels from another) was going to cost £8 for postage and packing. At those prices, I can afford to pay up to £3 more for each of the individual packs and I decided to see what PC World in Bury had and at what price.

So, On Saturday, 10th March, we set off in search of Avery CD labels In Bury. PC World no longer stocked them, so that was a waste of time. My second stop was at a stall in the indoor part of Bury Market that trades in mobile telephones and all manner of accessories for them, except a battery to fit my old Nokia 6310i.

Not deterred by my 100% lack of success so far, I made my way to the shop in the Millgate Mall that used to be Dixons and is now Currys (it's the same firm, just a different trading name). It was my intention to buy a multi-purpose DC power supply for a web camera Matthew has lent me, minus power supply, for use as a security surveillance device in the Old School. When asked by a young lady assistant if I needed any help, I explained what I wanted and received the reply "We used to stock them." That, I knew.

I was pointed in the direction of the local electronic shop on the Rock, Victor Wright, which I was intending to try next anyway. There, the young man asked me what voltage and current I wanted and when I said five volts and two amps, there was a sharp intake of breath, a short pause and the comment to the effect he didn't have one that big – there's a lot of electronics in one that big. And I was looking at about £20.

Still in happy mood, I proceeded to Wilkinsons to purchase a picture frame for a sketch of the characters from "Last of the Summer Wine" Jenny had bought me on her last trip to York, with Rachel. I was even happier when I found what I wanted (or thought I had! See later.)

Being time for lunch, I took Jenny to Summerseat Garden Centre for a sandwich and a nice pot of tea for two before buying 3 bags of organic top soil and a bag of organic, peat-free manure.

On returning home, I decided to put the aforementioned sketch in the frame I had purchased from Wilkinsons. The first disappointment came when I removed the cellophane wrapping to discover that the frame was not wood but some obnoxious, moulded plastic and, at over £7, grossly overpriced. As if things could not get any worse, in fitting the sketch in the frame, I received an un-noticed and un-felt paper cut on one of my fingers, smearing two spots of my fresh blood on the sketch. Fortunately, these were small and confined to the top and bottom borders of the sketch and we were able to conceal them with some correcting fluid. At least if it is ever stolen and subsequently found, it will be possible to identify it by matching it with my DNA.

On Sunday 11th March, we spent the day putting the soil and compost to good use, Jenny revitalising all the pot plants on the patio and in the conservatory, while I pruned and tied up the fruit bushes and cleared more cat droppings from the garden border.

On Monday 12th March, we were back in Ramsbottom for Jenny's piano lesson. Jenny has a replacement teacher for the present and she was impressed with her progress.

We returned home to find the Dyson washer had had enough and was displaying fault F10, which is something similar to what I was thinking. I decided to go online to the Dyson web site and book an engineer, as I have done in the past. I could not find the link to do this so I telephoned the free-call help line. After about ten minutes, a young lady informed me that this was now the only way of booking an engineer. Such is progress(?) Fortunately, my Dyson washer is registered on the web site and the young lady was able to locate all the details once I had given her the serial number of the machine. I told her what was wrong with it, including the missing line from the LCD display that has been faulty for a while (I didn't tell her the last bit). Since I did not have a service contract, the engineer would cost me £99, including all parts and labour and a twelve month guarantee on the machine once serviced, which seemed not unreasonable to me. Unfortunately, the engineer was not available until the following Monday, so the atmosphere was about to get a little ripe over the following few days.

On Tuesday 13th March, Jenny and I commenced the documentation for the Beaver meetings for the week. After lunch, Jenny went to her Yoga class and I was back listening to Sidney Bechet on CDs I had produced some time ago and editing a Bix Beiderbecke recording from cassette tape.

Wednesday 14th March took on a similar theme while Jenny went to have her hair cut, my having earlier completed all the documentation for this week's Beaver meetings.

In the evening, Jenny and Rachel spent a good four hours decorating pot tea-light holders the Beavers had made from air-drying clay the previous week and which Jenny and Rachel had subsequently varnished over week end. We finally retired at a quarter to one the following morning. Parents of Beavers, please note.

On Thursday 15th March, it was my turn to get involved with the Beavers again. My task, for which I do not get a badge, was to help Jenny wrap up the tea-light holders so that the children could give them to their mothers on Mothering Sunday.

After lunch, I settled down on my own desk top computer and finally managed to find some Avery CD labels online at a reasonable price at Monkey Office and, by boosting my shopping trolley to a value exceeding £30, excluding the dreaded VAT, by ordering a Canon black ink cartridge for my printer, again at a reasonable price, I obtained free delivery.

What is more, I located a spare battery for my mobile 'phone from 4mobiles.co.uk, also at a reasonable price and with free delivery.

While on a roll, I thought I would look for another external 1 Gb hard Drive because my 500 Gb IDE drive on my desk top is making some funny noises and I think its bearings are going. I know how it feels. I found two sites selling the drive I wanted at exactly the same price, one was Currys and the other was PC World. I looked at both web sites and, apart from the colours and company names, they are identical. Now there's a surprise.

On Friday 16th March, we went grocery shopping as usual to Unicorn and to Tesco in Bury. That was after a telephone call from the Old School asking if I had a set of Allen Keys, which I do. The lock on the front door was not working and the keys were needed to remove the handles so that the lock could be extracted for investigation.

I joined Mike and Frank at the front door and helped Frank dismantle the lock. Despite the ejection of a broken spring, Frank managed to get the lock working and we refitted it, although we advised Christine to buy a new one. I left Frank with the Allen Key he needed to fit a new lock since I had another one the same size.

When we returned from shopping, the mail had been, comprising my Mastercard account and a new registration document for my car. There was no sign of any delivery of my orders from the previous day.

The reason I have received a new registration document is that blank copies of the old form used by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency have been stolen, so they have changed them to avoid any consequences of dodgy dealing. I wonder what that's cost the tax-payer?

That train of thought reminded me of one of the newspaper headlines in Tesco – the fact that the Government was proposing to reduce the higher rate of tax from 50p in the pound to 40p in the pound, thus making the very rich even richer, while many at the other end of the scale are struggling to make ends meet. This was just about the last straw and as far as I am concerned, Guy Fawkes wasn't all bad.

Back to the plot (not the gunpowder plot). A ring at the door-bell in the mid-afternoon found a delivery man standing at the door with two parcels from Monkey Office. After he had gone, I examined the parcels and found the first contained my CD labels. Hurrah! The second contained a pack of Guildhall Slipfiles intended, according to the packing note, for a lady in Bournemouth. Boo! There was no sign of the Canon ink I had ordered, although it was listed on the packing note of parcel one. Both packages were, of course, addressed to me, so it's clearly not the delivery man's fault.

A quick E-mail to Monkey Office and a reply within fifteen minutes seemed to sort things out. Parcel 2 was scheduled for collection by the courier on the following Tuesday and my ink would be with me on the following Monday. So far so good.

Most of Saturday 17th March was spent touring round to the homes of various Beavers, delivering the presents the Beavers had made for Mother's Day and which, for one reason or another, some Beavers had not collected at their last session.

Sunday 18th March gave Jenny a pleasant break from the usual, daily chaining (she should be so lucky) to the kitchen sink. Matthew and Carrie invited us out for lunch at the Wilton Arms at Belmont, where we met up with Carrie's parents, Bob and Marie. We took the scenic route, along the narrow country lanes, across country to Belmont and on arrival, it became clear that the main A-roads would have been quicker, although not as pleasant on the warm, sunny afternoon. We had a most enjoyable lunch and came back the quicker way, which was better for both my and the car's fuel consumption.

Monday 19th was a day of great expectations; when it was over, I asked myself, what the Dickens?

Jenny disappeared off to her piano lesson and left me planning a design of a shelf for the cupboard under the kitchen sink, having cleared it completely in readiness for the Dyson engineer to repair the washer. I was in the middle of cutting the wood in the garage when the engineer arrived.

He came in, took one look at the machine and pronounced the death sentence. Dyson stopped making the new parts it needed two or three years ago. Since Dyson no longer makes washers, the engineer suggested a Miele, since they are well made (being German, they would be) and come with a ten year manufacturer's warranty on parts and labour. He disconnected the washer and left me to dispose of it. At least the engineer's visit didn't cost me anything.

I managed to heave the very heavy washer outside and surfed the Internet for a replacement, looking at Bosch, Miele and AEG. The top-of-the-range Miele was about £2,500. The next best was almost £1,000 cheaper. I didn't really like the look of the Bosch and AEG and suggested to Jenny that we go to the local Comet to see if they have the Miele W5964WPS in stock and if they will sell it to me at the same price as one of the lower-priced web sites. Since this did not meet with an immediate response, I decided to scrub the kitchen floor, as one does, cleaning the recess where the washer had been residing for the past five years and all the mess the engineer had made with spillage from the disconnected hoses.

There was, needless to say, no sign of my printer ink from Monkey Office or my mobile phone battery from 4mobiles.

I spent most of Tuesday 20th continuing my search for a new washer, or, at least, a supplier who sells the Miele W5964WPS at a reasonable price, before disappearing off to the dentist, thereby missing lunch.

The dentist was not sure what the problem was and proceeded to fill the very back tooth on the upper right, requiring not one, but two lots of anaesthetic. She did admit that there was a certain degree of trial and error to her approach, which I found honest but a

little worrying. The filling itself did not take long and I was back at the receptionist's desk making another appointment for, wait for it, Friday 13th April.

I returned home in time to watch Jenny finish her lunch and go to her Yoga class, Mike arriving in the intervening period, for a chat. Mike stayed for a good hour and as he left, the courier arrived with my black ink and to collect the parcel shipped in error by Monkey Office. Although Monkey Office mad a mistake, they certainly put it right quickly and I am inclined to think that this was the kind of one-off glitch I seem to attract like a magnet attracts ferrous metal.

Jenny arrived home shortly afterwards and we went down to Comet in Bury to see if they would sell me the washer at the same price that I had seen it at a store in Croyden, Surrey, saving some £300. The only difference between Comet and this other store is that Comet can deliver it quicker and, of course, I am dealing with a local store, which I prefer to do. We bought our Bosch Fridge/Freezer from this same shop when we refurbished the kitchen some five years ago on the same principle.

The chap at Comet was most helpful and said he would have to discuss the matter with his store manager, who was away for a couple of days and he promised to telephone me in two days' time.

In the evening we went to the village meeting at the Church and I rounded off the day with Mike and Frank in the Bull's Head.

On Wednesday 21st it was apparent that the dentist had not fixed my problem and I made another appointment for the afternoon at, would you believe, two-thirty (think about it). While contemplating another agonising session, I helped Jenny prepare for her Beaver meetings for the week as well as continually repositioning the back-up, automatic washer in the garage after each load.

The second washer we bought second-hand and installed some time ago in the garage, mainly for washing the cats' blankets and dusters, not wishing to contaminate our clothing with cat hairs and obnoxious chemicals. The growing pile of dirty clothes necessitated the bringing back of this device into active domestic service for carefully selected loads and Jenny had cleaned it out and used it the day before to wash my handkerchiefs that had been soaking in disinfectant following my recent viral infection. She subsequently used it for towels and the like. Unfortunately, when spinning, it has a tendency to move around the garage, as though it were trying to escape from the pile of washing, as Jenny does from the pile of ironing and I have to keep dragging it (and her) back. I have not yet discovered why this particular machine, a Servis, should do this and, frankly, I am quite surprised, since it is so heavy. The reason it was sold is now somewhat obvious.

I did spend some time repositioning the washer and taking measures to try to prevent it moving so that Jenny could use it for more dirty laundry the following day. She doesn't know when she's well off.

On Thursday 22nd we were up early since I had arranged to join Mike and Frank for a walk over the West Pennine Moors. The plan was to walk back to Greenmount from Haslingden, obtaining a lift to the starting point from Christine. Since Alistair and Steve Lancashire had been invited to join us, we needed two cars and Jenny reluctantly agreed

to ferry the second load of walkers to Haslingden, which is just as well, since Steve's son, Chris, also turned up. I drove there, followed by Christine and Jenny brought our car back home.

The six of us made our way up to the Rossendale Way on the west side of the valley and headed more or less south back towards Pilgrim's Cross. Finding the red flags flying at half mast on the boundary of the army training area, we decided not to follow the main path and cut across country, downhill, towards the lower track, which we eventually reached after trudging rather hurriedly across a couple of peat bogs, which the recent dry spell made just about navigable. With wet boots (inside and out) and black feet, we reached the Bull's Head for lunch, covering the seven miles or so in about three and a quarter hours. Those of you who have nothing better to do can see our route and a few pictures here: <http://www.a-trip.com/tracks/view/99187>.

While I was out trekking, the manager from Comet in Bury had telephoned Jenny to say they would match the price on the washer we wanted. Jenny was, of course, still catching up on her washing.

Also while I was out, the battery for my mobile phone arrived and I fitted it and put it on charge. Nothing happened. I removed it and put it on my spare Nokia 6310i and tried charging it on that. Again nothing happened.

On Friday 23rd, I exchanged a couple of E-mails with 4mobiles who had shipped out the battery and eventually arranged a replacement.

Our first shopping stop was at Comet in Bury and we placed an order for the Miele washer, to be delivered on 31st March. This is the second time we have ordered goods on a price match from Comet in Bury and I must say that I cannot fault the store on its policy and pre-sales customer service.

Our routine grocery shop at Unicorn, Asda Pilsworth and Tesco, Bury was enhanced by the experience of two flying mountain bikes.

Travelling up the M60 in a clockwise direction, having just joined it after leaving Unicorn, at a speed of 70 m.p.h. in the middle of the three lanes, the vehicle in front of us moved into the outside lane and increased its speed. We were about a couple of bus-lengths behind and to the left of it when the assembly on the back on which two mountain bikes were affixed suddenly disintegrated. The bikes bounced off onto the carriageway behind the vehicle and, fortunately, took a direction to the right, towards the central reservation, where they came to rest.

I jammed on the brakes but it seemed ages before the car slowed down significantly and we did drive over a small piece of debris in the middle lane, without incident. Thank goodness for ABS.

The vehicle in front of us in the middle lane had swerved to the left-hand lane to avoid the bikes in case they came his way and, fortunately, the motorway was not particularly busy, although we could not move left because there was another vehicle there.

The bike-less vehicle eventually came to a halt on the hard shoulder, presumably to await the traffic patrol to sort things out.

On returning home, I parcelled up the faulty mobile telephone battery and popped in the post box, sending back to the free-post address supplied.

The replacement battery for my mobile telephone arrived on Saturday 24th. I didn't get chance to do anything with it because we spent most of the day at the Old School, testing and pricing electrical equipment for the coming jumble sale.

On Sunday 25th, I had promised to go on the bike with Jenny down the Kirklees Trail to see what progress there had been on the extension into Bury. The fencing that had been erected at the end of the existing track was more horizontal than am I after a couple of beers and we were able to gain easy access to the rough ground leading to the new bridge over the valley. We rode our bikes all the way along the unfinished section to Brandlesholme Road before performing a Liberal Democrat manoeuvre (U-turn) to cycle back up the trail, homeward bound.

After lunch, I hoed all the back borders and raked most of the moss out of the lawn then crawled into the house to wash and change for tea.

On Monday 26th, I went into Ramsbottom with Jenny and potted round admiring the architecture while Jenny went for her piano lesson. Afterwards, we toured the charity shops and came home for lunch on the patio for the third day running.

After lunch, I washed the car and cleaned the car windows. Then I continued my work on the back garden, feeding the blackcurrant bushes with the black, smelly, worm-infested product from the compost bin and, having exhausted that supply, the rest of the borders with pellets of organic chicken poo. I get all the fun. I also fed the lawn, or what was left of it and, after the sun had moved round, put on the sprinkler for about three quarters of an hour to water in all the goodness.

On Tuesday 27th I discovered the replacement battery for my mobile 'phone would not charge. I give up. I sent an E-mail to 4mobiles telling them I was looking into the matter.

I helped Jenny with some Beaver work and, after lunch, not outside, for a change, went round to the Old School for a bit of decorating in the kitchen.

My first task was to test the telephone connection in the upstairs room. This actually worked!

My second task, delegated by Christine, was to help Mike put up a huge sign for the Antique's Fair on a large display board in the corner of the field at the junction of Brandlesholme Road and Longsite Road.

First, I had to come back home for the car. The sign was too large to fit in anyone else's and carrying it down the half mile or so would have taken too long.

I have often seen signs there but never actually seen anyone putting them up or taking them down. I found out why. It was not possible for either Mike or I to reach the top of the supporting poles without ladders, so we had to come back for some.

I decided to come back home for my three-section ladders and a board on which to stand them, otherwise they would have sunk into the ground, which was still quite soft despite all the hot, fine weather.

The ladders erected, I went up to the top and fixed the sign in place and then Mike and I tied off the securing ropes to each corner. That done, we returned to the Old School in time for some serious business - a brew.

I could not avoid picking up a paintbrush any longer and started to assist the chaps with painting the kitchen walls, much of the work already having been done. While the chaps cleaned up the brushes, rollers and paint trays, there was little enthusiasm for cleaning the worktops on which they had been standing in their outdoor shoes and on which food is prepared and from which it is served.

I decided it was no a good idea to risk giving a fair percentage of the Greenmount population salmonella and stayed behind to clean the worktops, sinks and bowl.

On Wednesday 28th March, Matthew arrived about 10:00 to help me remove the trailer from the garage to go to the tip with him and his garden rubbish. Three trips to the tip later, I was back home for lunch over an hour later than planned, missing out on lunch with the lads at the Bull's Head. After lunch, I helped Jenny with some Beaver preparation work.

I had intended going walking on Thursday 29th March but I rose later than planned and decided to cut the grass on the side, the bit the council is supposed to maintain. After lunch, I tidied up the border on the side of the car port and mortared two stones into place on the wall, one of which had been dislodged for some time. I started to fill in the large hole in the border where I had dug out the pampas grass, following Treacle's second expensive vet bill as a result of trying to eat some of it. It soon became apparent that I needed more soil than I had available. Fortunately it was time to pack up for tea.

The problem of the hole paled into insignificance once more as we sped off grocery shopping on Friday 30th March. Not feeling too well again, probably as a result of the frenzied activity over the past few days, making the best of the warm, dry weather, I did little else after we returned home.

We were up early again on Saturday, which is just as well, because the chaps telephoned to say they would be here in five minutes with our new washer at about 08:30. And they were. They placed it in the kitchen, for me to install and took all the packaging with them. What an excellent service from Comet/Miele.

Jenny and Rachel were frantically preparing for their day at Ashworth Valley where they were sleeping over with the Beavers. Meanwhile, I started work on installing the new washer. What a day to spend your 39th wedding anniversary.

The first bit, removing the transit bars, went according to plan.

Connecting the water supply (singular because it only takes cold water) proved a little more tricky. First, the bulky lump attached to the hose near the end would not fit through the hole in the bottom of the unit under the sink and I hit on the idea of using my jig saw to enlarge it. Unfortunately, because of all the other plumbing under the sink,

the jig saw was too large to reach most of the cuts needed and I ended up sawing out a good-sized chunk of the unit base by hand with a coping saw, during which process Matthew arrived with his new bike. He wanted to store it in my garage overnight since he was away with Carrie visiting friends in Oswestry and he did not want to leave it in his garage, their house being empty.

The bike safely stored, I returned to my knees, trying to fit the bulk of my frame into that of the cupboard under the sink. The water inlet connection simply would not fit and I was beginning to wonder if the Germans, who had built this machine, had different plumbing standards to us, not having the experience of inspecting German plumbing.

By this time, I was becoming just a trifle annoyed and, thinking of trifle, decided it was time for lunch.

After lunch, I raided my plumbing box for bits and pieces to test the thread on the connections and discovered that the washer hose was a standard thread and, reassured, eventually managed, not only to screw it onto the supply valve, but to do so without any leak.

My confidence restored, I turned my attention to the waste pipe. This was quite short and for it to reach, I had to manoeuvre the washer more or less into position under the worktop. I had checked the floor with a spirit level and it seemed more or less level, so I did not bother to adjust the washer feet, a move I later came to regret.

To describe the washer as heavy is like saying an elephant weighs a pound or two. With a fair amount of effort, I was able to move the washer into position and to feed the waste pipe where I wanted it. I even managed to connect it to the waste outlet under the sink. Unfortunately, the spring clip to hold it in place would not pass over the ridge on the end of the washer pipe. It did seem tight enough without it. Time would tell.

Then I noticed the washer was not quite level, although, unlike me, it didn't wobble about.

I turned on the water and ran the set up programme, which performed perfectly without incident. The final task was to calibrate the detergent level to zero and that done, I turned my attention to the next task of the day.

Having fed our cats, it was time to drive down to Matthew's house in Rachel's car to feed Carrie's cat (what a complicated life I lead) because Matthew and Carrie were away for the week end. I had reached Bury before it occurred to me I had not taken the keys to their house with me. Time for another U-turn.

I finally arrived to feed Penny an hour later than scheduled and on returning home, I started the preparations for my own evening meal, for which Jenny had left me precise instructions for re-heating the lasagne and garlic bread she had left me in the fridge. Jenny is always optimistic about re-heating times and I gave the aforesaid items double the time she had indicated, which turned out to be about right. Meanwhile, I consumed a bottle of organic Oxford Gold beer, a chef's privilege.

It was about 8 p.m. before I settled down to eat and watch a DVD, turning in just after midnight. But that's another month.