

Greenmount March 2016

Tuesday March 1st: I was up at 7 a.m. in preparation for the walk with the other three chaps in the village from Edge Lane, Ashton, where we left off the Tameside Trail the previous week, to Greenfield, Oldham. I had a rather restless night with some vivid dreams and a feeling of foreboding, almost premonition, in fact and I was not happy about the prospect of walking. When I looked outside, it was pouring with rain and very wet, enough to convince me that walking was not a good idea and I decided against it. On a nicer day, I would have enjoyed it but I saw no sense in walking in the rain and tramping over waterlogged terrain, particularly when I had a choice and did not have to do so.

Jenny remained in bed until about 9 a.m. so I delayed breakfast until she stirred. I busied myself finishing off the February monthly update and posting it to my web site.

After breakfast and washing the pots, I was usefully employed fixing the damaged bits of Rachel's Sindy toys ready for selling. Would you believe that series of fiddly jobs took me all day?

It did actually stop raining before lunch but it remained dull, damp and cold all day. We had intended on a brief trip into Ramsbottom in the afternoon if it turned fine but I was otherwise occupied as above so that had to wait until the following day.

Wednesday March 2nd: And so it came to pass that we did venture forth into the organic wilderness that was Ramsbottom amidst the thunder and hail. Jenny located a couple of books in the charity shops and a few groceries in Morrisons, Tesco and Lolos and I purchased a fresh supply of Saw Palmetto for my enlarged, benign prostate, for which, I trusted, it would be utterly grateful and some St. John's Wort, which I was told at the health shop would be good for my shingles rash. Time would tell.

We lunched at home despite the efforts of an enthusiastic young lady at Lolos to persuade us otherwise. Jenny went off to have her hair cut at 3:30 and I settled down to listen to some jazz and light a fire. Jenny was back before I was even half way through the CD but I continued to listen to it anyway. Jenny donned my earphones, not to listen in, but, with them unplugged, they muffled the sound somewhat while she read her book.

Thursday March 3rd: After a somewhat restless night, which I attributed to a late evening cup of herbal tea, we strolled downstairs about 9:30 a.m. to a reasonable morning and no water. Fortunately, we keep a stock of bottled water for drinking.

After breakfast, I checked online with United Utilities to find out if there was a problem. A leak on just up the road had been reported at 6:45 a.m. and an inspector was "on his way". I contacted United Utilities using their online chat service and a very helpful gentleman called Geoff responded almost immediately. I explained the problem and asked for an estimated time for the repair. He went away to find out and came back with the same information that was on the web site. I pointed out that United Utilities had known about the problem for over 4½ hours and I expected some development by this time. He assured me they were aware of the urgency and took my telephone and mobile numbers, presumably so someone could telephone and/or send me a text message when the repair was completed.

Since I could not wash the pots or clean the fire from the previous day's use, we went outside and used the soil we had purchased to tidy up the herb raised bed and to fill the second raised bed in preparation for growing some vegetables. We were not dissuaded by the attempt to rain and it gave up before we did. Unfortunately, we did not have enough soil to complete the second bed and decided we would purchase more shortly.

By the time I had cleaned the cat's latrine for the first time since winter set in, we found we had a reduced-pressure water supply, which was just as well.

We washed the pots, after which it was time for lunch. I let that settle by relaxing and listening to an old episode of *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again* (ISIRTA), one of the best radio comedy series the BBC ever produced and was repeating on BBC Radio 4 Extra. Unfortunately, many of the episodes had been cut in parts with about five minutes of the original broadcast missing and I was eagerly waiting for the restored episodes to be rebroadcast.

Jenny went off to Yoga while I cleaned out the fire, after which I caught up on two more episodes of ISIRTA while watching the window cleaner go through his monthly routine. We are never short of entertainment here in Greenmount.

Friday March 4th: We awoke to a blanket of snow and it was still snowing fast. The prospect of travelling down the motorway to Unicorn did not fill me with enthusiasm.

We had a leisurely breakfast and washed the dishes before departing just after 10 a.m. By this time I judged the traffic into Bury would have sorted itself out and I was right, aided by the rising temperature to just above freezing that was helping to melt the snow on the roads, even the ones on our estate.

I called at Kwik Fit in Bury to obtain a price for four new tyres, the existing ones having been flagged up as needing replacement at the last service in January. I arranged to take the car in for the new tyres on the coming Wednesday when we would be in Bury anyway.

The first section of our journey to the M66 and down the M66 to the junction with the M60 and the M62 went well enough although some drivers were travelling far too fast for the conditions, the carriageway being extremely wet, resulting in a good deal of spray and poor visibility. The roundabout at the interchange was full of queuing traffic and it took a while to reach it from the slip road. That was due to a broken-down lorry in the nearside lane of the roundabout and queuing traffic on the M60 anticlockwise. I decided not to join the queue and performed a 540° manoeuvre to (a) totally confuse other motorists and (b) take the M60 clockwise to the next junction where I could use the A roads to circumnavigate Manchester city centre and head down to Chorlton by way of the A56 (Chester Road). That went well, although the turn off the A56 to Chorlton was a bit of a winding route, fortunately, well signposted.

We left Waitrose about 3:20 p.m. and risked the return journey on the M60. Apart from a slow section approaching the bridge over the ship canal to the M62 junction, through which, due to some skillfull driving, I was able to keep moving, that went well enough too. We were home just after 4 p.m.

Saturday March 5th: Our day at the Old School for the morning village Drop In and

testing electrical equipment for the next jumble sale ended at 2:30 when Jenny had an appointment at the opticians in Ramsbottom. She had been having pain in her eyes for about a month on and off and had telephoned that morning to see the optician at the earliest opportunity. It was good of him to fit her in so soon and it took about an hour for him to diagnose a minor complaint, that being dry eyes, for which he prescribed some drops five times daily.

Back home, I dealt with my E-mails that had built up over the past few days and updated the village and the Tottington web sites, which took me a good three hours.

My sister Barbara telephoned from hospital, having been admitted a couple of days earlier and confirmed she was alright and expected to be home by the coming Tuesday with medication for her condition. I also talked to my niece, Julie and my nephew, John and felt happier having done so. I said we would arrange to go to see Barbara once she was back home.

Sunday March 6th: We had a lazy day, Matthew and Carrie taking us and Carrie's parents for Mother's Day lunch to Lolo's in Ramsbottom. Matthew brought his mum a card and took us to Ramsbottom in his car, where we met up with Bob and Marie in Lolo's.

The restaurant was something of a new experience for me, being a vegan establishment and I settled for tomato and basil soup for the first course, which came with a chunky piece of brown bread and a good helping of an acceptable spread, the kind with which I was not unfamiliar at home. The soup was hot and well spiced with black pepper, making it just the kind of warmer required on such a cold day.

For the main course, I was torn between the Irish Stew and the Rasa Biriyani. I settled on the latter, comprising Basmati rice, sugar snap peas, carrots, peppers, red onion, peas, cashew nuts, coriander leaf, mint leaf and, not surprisingly, Indian spices. Given that I was raised as a carnivore, I found the meal full of flavour, palatable and filling. If I were to be picky, I would say I found it on the dry side but that was resolved with a very nice and not unreasonably-priced bottle of organic (yes, organic) Chardonnay. I finished off with a piece of Bakewell tart, served with soya pouring cream. A little less filling and a little more jam in the tart would have been nice, otherwise it was very nice.

On the whole, we all enjoyed the meal and the very helpful and friendly people who worked so hard there and I have no hesitation in recommending it.

Rachel arrived in the late afternoon with a card and flowers for her mum.

Monday March 7th: The day started with what I thought was going to be a brief check of my E-mails and ended up with an update to the village web site. I then divided the day between preparing a portfolio of antique (I use the word in its loosest sense), collectable and larger items we had for sale at our car boots, photographing some of the Cindy toys Rachel had and which were quite collectable and auditing and tidying up my growing collection of DVDs. The latter took quite some time, since they seem to be out of order and it took me a while to find the ones I needed to put them back in order.

Unfortunately, I did not take advantage of the blue sky and sun and I hoped it would continue for a good few days.

Tuesday March 8th: Another check of my E-mails resulted in a further update to the village web site Dementia page. That was a page dedicated to Dementia sufferers and carers.

Much of the rest of the day was dedicated to wood cutting, with Jenny helping to bag up the logs after she had finished her ironing for the day. Such feverish activity necessitated a shower and a complete change of clothes. It had certainly kept me warm on such a cold, damp day.

Wednesday March 9th: An early morning Skype call with my sister, Edith, in New Zealand was followed by breakfast and the usual chore of pot washing before we set off in the rain for Bury.

I had arranged to take in the car to Kwik Fit to have four new tyres fitted while we attended a customer-only preview of items for sale at Newtons antiques and replica shop on the Rock in its last few days of trading. When we arrived at the shop, there was a long queue of people waiting to enter the premises and we were not about to join it in the pouring rain. Instead, we went round the shops. Jenny wanted some corduroy trousers but didn't find any. I found a pair and a pair of blue Chinos.

We collected a few groceries and headed back to collect the car, driving home for lunch.

I spent the afternoon filing away the DVDs we had watched recently and preparing sale documents for some of the Sindy items I had photographed on Monday. If all the items sold at their asking price, we might make a few bob.

Thursday March 10th: I finished off the sale documents I started the previous day and noted that I needed to revise a couple of sale documents for other items I had prepared previously. That was after washing the pots and, as one does, completing my bowel sample, for which I had received the kit some two weeks previous, ready for posting. That had provided me with endless enjoyment over the past couple of days.

I turned my attention to filing away the CDs to which I had recently listened and adding them to my growing collection, for which I was rapidly running out of room.

Friday March 11th: The usual shopping trip to Asda, Pilsworth and Village Greens and Tesco at Prestwich went well and we finished later than planned due to a late start, which meant we did not manage to dine out for lunch at Owens in Ramsbottom, run by the previous owners of the Red Lion at Hawkshaw, which had, sadly, become a John Willie Lees pub.

It turned quite cold about 4 p.m. and I decided to light the fire. That did not go well at all. Despite having had the chimney swept recently, the paper used to ignite the kindling not only failed to do so but smouldered to such an extent that the fire filled with dense white smoke. That would not have been so bad had the smoke made its exit in the conventional way, via the chimney. Instead, it forced its way out through the vents that were supposed to feed air into the fire, giving the lounge the smell one associated with an over-enthusiastic barbecue. Fortunately, I was able to keep the smouldering to a minimum and force the smoke out of the lounge through open windows with the aid of a towel, waved frantically. I was not sure what any passing native North American would have made of it, though.

You will have noticed, of course, that opening the windows somewhat negated the purpose of the fire, these being left ajar until I had successfully ignited the fire, not intending to be beaten or suffocated by a stubborn, inanimate object.

It is needless to comment that the fire did not raise the temperature sufficiently by 5 p.m. to prevent the hall thermostat demanding heat from the radiators and the gas supplier was, once again, keeping his hands warm by rubbing them together.

I was determined to show the stove who was master and piled it high with wood to produce a roaring fire that would dispel any obstacle, such as damp from the recent rain, from the chimney and it soon convinced the thermostat that the gas boiler was redundant for the evening.

Saturday March 12th: We were up just after 7 a.m., which made a nice change, to what promised to be a fairly nice day again, not that we would benefit from it, spending most of the day in preparation for the jumble sale in just over a week's time at the Old School. The day had not lived up to expectations, as we strolled home about 3 p.m. under an overcast sky with the threat of rain.

I settled down to listen to Jazz Record Requests. Of the twelve tracks played, four were, in my opinion, worthwhile. One of those I already had as a recording and one had vocals in Dutch. Of the remaining two, one was under the "unusual instrument" umbrella and featured the washboard. The choice of tune was left to the presenter and came from Australia. Personally, I would have thought there were much better examples of washboard Jazz both in the UK and the USA. The remaining tune featured Max Geldray on harmonica. I did not think that Mouth Organ Swing No 1 was one of his best numbers but it was a lot better than some of the rubbish that passed for modern jazz.

Sunday March 13th: I spent much of the day trying to resurrect Matthews old tower computer that had been lying dormant in the conservatory for over six months. I did manage to bring it back to life in the middle of last year but it subsequently refused to load up and I put it on the back-burner, as it were.

I followed a troubleshooting guide I found on the Internet to try to identify the cause of it not loading up and I had begun to suspect a faulty power supply. The strategy suggested was to unplug various power connections and reconnect them, which made no difference. The next step was to remove various components and refit them. Having already tried the hard drive, I turned my attention to the graphics card and gave it a good vacuuming in the process. Since that did not work either, I started on the memory modules and reseating the second one had the desired effect.

I now had a Windows 7 system up and running, except that it was over six months out of date and, being powered off for so long, the computer had lost all its basic settings (for the more technical oriented people reading this, the BIOS settings, including the date). I set these to the defaults and reset the date.

The first priority was to update Windows. Unfortunately, the Microsoft update mechanism seemed to just sit there for hours just searching for updates and getting nowhere.

Further investigation on the Internet suggested a strategy of installing a patch (update) to

speed up the installation of updates. That just sat there looking for existing updates before it would start.

Another strategy suggested deleting the contents of the folder C:\windows\SoftwareDistribution and then reinstalling this patch. That went alright except the attempt to search for further updates using this patch made no further progress than the original attempt.

I decided to look at the update history and to my horror, deleting the recommended folder contents had removed all the previous update history. I had a feeling that was not such a good idea.

Fortunately, I had taken a copy of the Windows 7 system on another hard drive and I reloaded the system from that. I then left the system to search for updates overnight to see what happened.

Monday March 14th: To my relief, the search for updates had found 70. All it needed was a little (alright, a lot of) patience. Apparently, Windows 7 was not noted for its speed when it came to searching for and applying updates. I left the system to install those it had found while I had breakfast, washed the pots and started an update of the village web site on my desktop computer.

That was interrupted by a visit to the dentist for a check up, for which we were both given the all clear. That was at least two visits in a row for which I did not need any treatment. I was thinking of asking for a refund on my heavy monthly premium.

The computer I was fixing needed a restart and then I left it to find more updates while I had lunch and left it to install them while we went to see Matthew and Carrie's new kitchen they were having supplied and fitted by the same people Carrie's mum and dad and we had used, Paul Davies in Bolton. Maybe we should be asking for commission?

On returning, I carried on with the village web site while the sick computer searched for and installed a third set of updates. That was interrupted by tea, which Jenny prepared for me before she went off for a meal with a couple of friends at the Bull's Head.

After tea, the computer being repaired, having completed all its windows updates, I left to install the Norton anti-virus software while I finished off the village web site.

Then it was time to finish off the faulty computer, bring the other ancillary software up to date and shut it down for the night.

I also shut down for the night. I settled down to watch The Return of the Flying Scotsman. This was not some Gaelic horror movie but a programme about the magnificent steam engine that made its come-back debut on the local heritage line in Bury, the East Lancashire Railway. That was followed by Len Goodman's Big Band Bonanza and Len Goodman's Dancing Feet – The British Ballroom Story, both having connections with the evolution of Jazz.

It had been another eventful day with the prospect of more to follow.

Tuesday March 15th: We spent the day at Rachel's flat, dealing with a few items needing

attention, not least being the shower. The holder for the showerhead had been broken by the previous tenants and had been repaired using PVA glue. Being soluble in water, this was not a particularly good idea, having become apparent, the fitting having a designer look, i.e. ugly and useless.

Having removed the whole slider rail and holder from the wall, we walked up to the bathroom shop on the end of the road. This shop bore the same name as that on the mixer tap and, although the part I had in my hand bore no identifying marks it seemed to be logical to expect it had been supplied from the same source. The shop, being a design shop with lots of very nice displays in modern, spacious, well-lit surroundings, was not equipped to provide spares and the shop assistant, or design consultant to give her the official title, did her best to help, somewhat unsuccessfully. We left with a contact at their official spares department.

I brought the whole fitting home with the intention of contacting the spares department and sending a photograph of the item in the hope they could identify the spare part I needed.

Wednesday March 16th: We had a day out at Smithills Hall, Bolton, organised by Faith Greenhalgh of the Tottington and District Civic Society. This included a tour of the Hall, which was first built in the 14th century, followed by lunch that had been prepared more recently.

Thursday March 17th: I left Greenmount at about 9:20 with Mike, Frank and Steve, Mike's wife, Lorna, giving us a lift to Bury to catch the tram to Piccadilly Station. We hopped onto the train to Boradbottom and set off about 11ish on our walk on a lovely sunny, cool day, heading towards Greenfield, near Oldham on the Tameside Way. This was the most rural part of the circular walk and the most hilly part. We did not hit the first steep climb until after lunch, which we had on a nice grassy bank shortly after crossing the A57 and the A628 in Mottram.

The grassy climb was long and steep and somewhat tiring, requiring the odd stop to catch our breath. Needless to say, by this time, we had also strayed from the official path due to the lack of signs and way-markers, and that was even following a large-scale OS map and using a GPS.

After a more comfortable stretch and passing between a couple of high-altitude reservoirs, we faced another long, steady climb over the top of the moors before dropping down into Carbrook. This was a "bail-out" point and given that the next option for encountering civilization was a good two hours away and it was about 4:30 p.m., we decided to take advantage of the bus that arrived almost immediately to take us to Ashton, where we caught the tram to Piccadilly Station and changed to the following tram to Bury.

We retired, as usual, to the Art Picture House for a meal and a couple of beers before taking a taxi back to Greenmount.

Friday March 18th: We had our usual grocery shopping day out in the rather less scenic surroundings of Chorlton and Broadheath. That was followed by a short session at the Old School, preparing for the Jumble Sale.

Saturday March 19th to Monday March 21st: Three solid, long days at the Old School, testing and pricing electrical equipment, culminated in a somewhat successful (for us, at least) Jumble Sale from 4 to 6 p.m. on March 21st and we were home, after helping tidy up, by 6:30 p.m. Rachel and I whizzed off to Asda at Pilsworth for some wine while Jenny prepared tea. It all became a little hazy after that.

Tuesday March 22nd: We were up early again for a trip to the vet with our cat, Toffee. The vet wanted to check our cat's health before prescribing another three month's supply of tablets for her kidneys. In the event, she took a blood sample for analysis and, while she was there, clipped her claws. The cat wasn't happy. The vet also examined her ears and eyes. The former were alright and we were advised to clean them regularly with baby wipes or something similar. Her eyes were quite badly affected by cataracts and the cat was too old to consider doing anything about them.

While Jenny was with the vet, with the cat, I went off to the refuse recycling station to dump a car load of rubbish from the jumble sale and Jenny was waiting for me when I returned, the cat having seen the vet. The cat was relieved to be back in the car. She was even more relieved to be home. My bank balance was somewhat less healthy after the experience.

My afternoon was spent on updates of the two web sites I manage, preventing me from creating other mischief.

Wednesday March 23rd: We decided to have a trip out to the Trafford Centre with Rachel and we started in John Lewis, where I marvelled at all the new technology while the ladies wandered round the clothing section. I ended up discussing the merits of the latest TV designs with a chap representing LG. I pointed out that the development of the new range of 4G HD TVs was more than just a little pointless since the quality of transmitted channels received terrestrially (by the conventional aerial) and even those received by satellite were not even DVD quality, let alone 4D HD. Even the bandwidth of fibre broadband limited the quality of audio-visual signals. These high-end, expensive televisions really only came into their own when watching high definition video from a blue-ray DVD and how many people did that on a regular basis? This was a classic case of over-development and convincing people to buy products they didn't need, fleecing them in the process. If half the effort that went into the research and development of these pointless items were directed to more useful projects, we would all be better off.

We lunched at Marks and Spence, where we discovered a limited choice of gluten-free products and suggested they provided more.

After that and a brief visit to Lakeland, we made our way home via Rachel's flat in an attempt to fix her shower, having glued the broken part of the shower head holder back together. That didn't last long, as the piece broke off again as soon as I inserted the shower head and we resolved to bring it back home and pursue the replacement part, of which I had received no reply from Sanifix. Now there's a surprise.

Thursday March 24th: Jenny's niece, Tracey and her nephew, Simon, came from Sheffield to visit. We lunched at the Toby Carvery because it was convenient. The meal was just about passable and we couldn't help but recall when it was a proper pub and restaurant with proper meals and a proper name – The Bull's Head. I supposed that the decline of the British Empire had to start somewhere. The people who served us were very nice

and helpful and deserved better.

Friday March 25th: We had our usual brief shopping trip to Asda at Pilsworth, and Village Greens and Tesco at Prestwich, returning home for lunch. On returning home, I felt very tired and fell asleep.

Saturday March 26th: We spent the day tidying up in the garage

Sunday March 27th: We had been invited down to Matthew and Carrie's house for Easter Sunday lunch with Carrie's parents, Bob and Marie. That was very nice indeed and we left with an invitation to Christmas dinner, to which we very much looked forward.

Monday March 28th: We spent the day helping out at the Antique and Collector's Fair at the Old School. Jenny was helping to sell kitchenware and I helped Mike and Frank selling DVDs, CDs and records.

Tuesday March 29th: We rescued the old child's desk and chair from the garage, cleaned it up and placed it in the kitchen. This was intended for the car boot sale and one of our acquaintances in the village had expressed an interest in it. They were coming to view it later in the afternoon.

After lunch, we popped into Ramsbottom for the usual tour of the charity shops and arrived back just in time for our visitors.

Having felt the weight of the desk lid and observed that its effect on tiny fingers resting on the ledge on which the lid would come to a sudden rest were it to fall in an uncontrolled manner, they decided not to purchase it for their grandchild.

Wednesday March 30th: We spent the whole day at the Old School in charge of the records and DVDs for the "Book Sale". The sale of books had been extended to include a few other items as well as our music section. While there, I tested a Technics Hi-Fi system that had recently been donated and, apart from missing speakers, phono leads and power cables, the only faults were with the record deck that was missing a stylus and had a broken lid.

Thursday March 31st: I went round to the Incredible Edible plot to meet Donna and Dave Archer for the first gathering of 2016 and for what was deemed to be a planning meeting. I found Dave hard at work digging away with a fork, turning over and weeding the wild flower bed ready for this year's sowing. Although I had gone in my wellies and took my gardening gloves, I was not really prepared for anything strenuous and Donna and I chatted while Dave worked. It was a scene reminiscent of the typical labouring gang of three – one working while two watched. Dave pointed out we were one short. There was no-one to make the tea. The outcome of the session was that Donna would order some more top soil to fill up the beds that had settled since last year and arrange for delivery on April; 12th and we would all reassemble then for a good morning's work.

After lunch, I did quite a bit of web site updating and mail checking while Jenny tended her washing and sorted her car boot.

Being our 43rd wedding anniversary, we had booked a table for 7 p.m. at Owens restaurant in Ramsbottom. The restaurant was run by the same couple who used to own

the Red Lion at Hawkshaw before it plunged to the depths in becoming a member of the John Willie Lees chain. If I were to rate Owens restaurant on a scale from 1 (= abysmal) to 10 (= excellent) for its food, its wine and its service, I would give it 11. It was by far the best meal I had eaten out for a long time in pleasant, roomy surroundings, with no obnoxious background music, served by very nice waiters and waitresses who made time to chat and who were most accommodating when it came to providing gluten-free dishes for Jenny.

So the month ended on a high note, not to mention a merry one.