

Greenmount – May 2014

May 2014 started as hectically as April had finished. “Was there a connection there?” you might ask. Then again...

We set off for Sheffield early on Thursday 1st May, collecting Jenny’s brother, Wilf, and his wife, Anne from their home in Sheffield and arriving at Shiregreen Cemetary in good time for the funeral service and burial of Jenny’s eldest sister’s husband, Freddie. Again, it was a good opportunity to meet up with family members we rarely see and it was unfortunate that the only time we seemed to do so was on sad occasions.

After the funeral, the four of us went for a passable meal at the refurbished Meadow Farm at Chapeltown before returning to Wilf and Anne’s house for a cup of tea and a short rest.

We were back on the road again by 4:30 p.m., heading for sunny Scunthorpe and our overnight accommodation at the Travelodge there. Never having been to Scunthorpe before, we followed the directions from “Google Maps” with a map as back up and arrived safely.

Having settled into our room, we went in search of Woodland’s Crematorium, where we were to attend another funeral service the following day. Walking along the A18 towards Scunthorpe centre, following the directions from “Google Maps” once more, there was no sign of the right turn onto Brumby Wood Lane and not a signpost in sight pointing to the crematorium. In desperation, we asked some local people and discovered the road we required off the A18 was Scotter Lane. Brumby Wood Lane was the first left turn after the railway viaduct down there. So much for “Google Map” instructions.

We retraced our steps back to the Travelodge and went for an evening meal at the Old Farmhouse Fayre and Square pub next door. We were going to settle for fish and chips but they had run out of fish. We chose lamb rump steaks instead, with a side order of fresh vegetables. We would have had jacket potatoes instead of chips but they didn’t have any of those left either. Jenny had a salad and I had chips. There was worse to come. After paying for my order, I was told they had no fresh vegetables left and received the £2 refund (actually, the cost was £1.99 so I was a penny up). For a sweet we both chose the blackberry and apple crumble with ice cream. The crumble was in a pastry case and it was had going and could have done with more filling. The quantity of ice cream was a bout half a scoop each. Apart from that, the meal was quite good and the cost was not high. Experience suggests, when it comes to food (and drink) you get that for which you pay. I have to say, I am used to better and paying a fair (as opposed to fayre?) price for it.

We woke about 7 a.m. on 2nd May and we were up about 8 a.m. An alarm clock was superfluous to our stay, the noisy family opposite providing the necessary stimulus.

Since breakfast was not included in the cost of the room, we had decided to take our own and ate it in our room. We checked out and drove to the Crematorium, arriving about 10 a.m., with well over an hour to spare.

The service for Brian Brooks, the husband of the late Iris Brooks, she being the sister of James Smith who was married to Jenny’s sister, Pamela (I hope you’ve followed this

because there is an examination question at the end) was well attended, very nice and went as well as these things can.

We returned to Brian's home in Haxey for a buffet wake and a chat with his other relatives and friends before heading home, via the M180, M18 and M62 and M66. The general standard of driving was appalling and I was amazed that accidents on Motorways are so few. Many drivers seem to think that the speed limit is a target to be exceeded and the car in front is the one in front of which you must always be. It also occurred to me they might also be the kind of people who always ended sentences with prepositions, assuming they are able to write.

We arrived home in the late afternoon and started to catch up on the administration work that had piled up over the last few days. It soon became evident it was going to take a while, particularly the Beaver work that had been generated for Jenny.

Saturday 3rd May was spent grocery shopping. Having missed a week, the cupboards were bare and this turned out to be a rather large hunter-gatherer expedition. In the afternoon, we started to help Rachel pack up her chattels ready for moving to her new apartment in Manchester, having secured the hire of a suitable van for Monday, a bank holiday. (judging by the way banks are run these days, I didn't think they needed designated days such as this. I thought they were permanently on holiday.)

We spent the morning of Sunday 4th May at Church Parade, where the main theme was the plans to repair and improve the church. That was followed by a little socialising, catching up on all the village events and lunch at home.

In the afternoon, we were frantically trying to complete Rachel's packing and we dismantled her bed ready for moving, which meant she had to spend the night on a blow-up bed on the floor. Fortunately, we had an electric pump with which to inflate it, otherwise it could have been very embarrassing.

We collected the van at 9:45 on Monday 5th May and, by the time I reached home with it, Matthew had already arrived to help with the move. It took much longer than expected to load the van and secure all the items so they did not move about during the journey.

I reflected that this was the day on which I was supposed to be helping with the village party, putting out the road diversion signs for the road closure through the village, erecting the stalls and gazebos and wandering round taking pictures of the event for the web site. That would have been much easier, I thought and the remainder of the day only served to confirm this.

The journey to Manchester was uneventful except that I was expecting various bits to fall off the van at any time, it not being in the best of condition. Fortunately, we did not need to try the windscreen wipers and at least the brakes worked – after a fashion. I did have to stop to put in some diesel, more than I needed as it turned out.

Not only did we have to cart everything up to the sixth floor in the passenger lift, the only one available, but Matthew and I had to dismantle the existing bed frame and store it on the floor under Rachel's bed we had brought down, after we had assembled it. To make matters worse, the old bed mattress had not been removed by the landlord as agreed and the underside was so full of black mould as to pose a health hazard. Matthew

and I ended up putting it in the refuse room on the sixth floor to await disposal and/or decontamination. We then had a good wash before dismantling the somewhat scruffy frame.

Meanwhile, Jenny was busy steam cleaning everything in sight and Rachel was scrubbing things with cream cleaner and anti-bacterial wipes.

Matthew and I also installed Rachel's TV, DVD player and VHS recorder before the three of us left Rachel to unpack her boxes and tidy up, something that would probably take her a few weeks, at about 4 p.m.

We dropped Matthew off near his house on the way back and, arriving home, I telephoned the man at the garage, as arranged, to ask him when he wanted the van returning. The telephone call went to his mobile answering service and I left a message. Not surprisingly, he didn't reply, having opened up just for us, this being a bank holiday.

Jenny and I went out to buy something quick for tea, she not wanting to cook much after such a long hard day. We settled on a pizza each and a bottle of wine. Wine doesn't need cooking at all.

We were up early on Tuesday 6th May, firstly to return the van before 9 a.m. and secondly to go to the dentist at 10 a.m. It is fortunate we returned home between these two events because the dentist's receptionist telephoned to say she had to cancel our appointments. The dentist had returned from her holiday to find the chair had broken. I blamed the three bears.

We rearranged our appointments and decided to go to Bury on the bus for a few things we still needed, not least some washing up liquid because Jenny had left her cleaning box at Rachel's apartment. We lunched at Leckenbys in the Millgate shopping centre, a little expensive but very nice and well worth it.

We were back home for about mid afternoon and I caught up with more administration work.

On Wednesday 7th May we were back on the bus, this time to Bolton. I had to go to be measured for my suit that Matthew had arranged to hire for the wedding. We would have gone the previous day but I forgot. That, and the trip back took all of three hours and we were back in time for lunch.

Having reached the time of year when we turn off the heating and use the log fire in the evening, yet another daily chore was cleaning out the fire and this was the first task after lunch. To my dismay, I discovered that the glass in the door had cracked from top to bottom and was loose. I made a mental note to find someone to fix it. This was no doubt another of those simple jobs that would take a couple of years to complete.

That and more administration work took care of the afternoon.

Thursday 8th May was also devoted to daily chores and yet more administration work. It's amazing where time goes when you're having fun, especially when the weather is so bad.

Friday 9th May was another routine grocery shopping day with the added bonus of a present for Jenny. I had bought her a new Bosch steam iron from John Lewis and we collected it from Waitrose (also owned by John Lewis) in Broadheath before we had lunch. A late start meant a late finish and Jenny only had an hour and a half on our return to put away all the shopping, have a cup of tea and prepare for Beavers.

We started cleaning the bathroom on Saturday 10th May and succeeded in removing the mould from the grout round the tiles and from the shower fittings. That took most of the day, which didn't matter because it was wetter outside than I was getting in the bathroom.

We didn't continue the bathroom cleaning on Sunday 11th May because Rachel came to help Jenny with the annual report for her Thursday and Friday Beaver Colonies for the Scout Group A.G.M. the following Friday. I kept my head down and started to clear the pile of paperwork off my desk, most of which needed scanning and storing on my computer.

I continued this work on Monday 12th May while Jenny started what turned out to be a marathon ironing session, lasting several days.

Tuesday morning, 13th May provided both of us with a brief respite while we tackled some Beaver administration work. Our builder arrived in the late morning to start work on the landing floor, removing what remained of the old chipboard flooring and replacing it with nice, new, tongue and groove (proper) flooring I had purchased a couple of months earlier, having intended to do the job myself, before I was ill. Meanwhile, I was back tidying my paperwork.

Wednesday 14th May was more or less a repeat of the previous day and I was beginning to wonder if we had been caught in a time-loop. Then I noticed it had actually stopped raining and the sun (I saw it once or twice before, so I knew what it was) began to shine.

Tony, our builder finished the landing floor and he had made an excellent job of it. All the new planks were as flush to the old boards, where they joined, as they could be and all were neatly screwed down. I couldn't have done a better job. In fact, I couldn't have done as good a job. I awaited his bill.

After Tony had left, we put the old carpet back on the landing and moved some furniture about. The house was beginning to look less like a tip and more like a warehouse.

Thursday 15th May was a nice, sunny day and, since we don't get many of those, I took the opportunity to cut the grass and generally tidy up outside. By teatime, I had cut the back lawn and hoed the borders and cut the grass/weeds/moss on the front garden for the first time this year. It was 6:30 by the time I had swept up and put everything away and I was so exhausted I didn't even have the strength for a beer.

On Friday 16th May, we went grocery shopping as usual, noticing that certain gluten-free and organic lines that we had been buying on a more or less regular basis from Waitrose seemed to have disappeared from the shelves. There had been no sign of organic beef joints for the past few weeks and no sign of any organic lamb except for the one

occasion on which we purchased two half-legs. We took it that had been delivered to the store by mistake, since it was the one and only time we had seen it in the fridge.

It was fortunate we had taken a cool-box for all the frozen and cold produce because the temperature reached 23 degrees! That was double what it had been for as long as I could remember.

Saturday 17th May was Beaver and Cub Fun Day at Ashworth Valley and we were up at 6:30 a.m. and Jenny was collected at 7:45 a.m., being given a lift by a Cub Leader who lived just round the block.

I spent the day in the garden and I was still tending the common plot on the side of the house, trimming back the ivy on the garage side wall, when Jenny arrived back at about 6:30 and it was shortly afterwards that I cut back the middle finger on my left hand, which had been mistaken by the secateurs as a thick branch of ivy. Fortunately, the nick was not too deep and I quickly washed it in hot, soapy water and Dettol. Suitably plastered, I decided it was time to pack up before I did myself any more damage.

We spent Sunday 18th May at Rachel's apartment, taking down more of her possessions still at our house and helping her clean her bedroom cupboards before putting her clothes in them. We would otherwise have been at the car boot in Ramsbottom but Jenny was too exhausted after the previous day's activity.

On Monday 19th May, we started preparation for our visitors from Australia, dismantling the bunk beds from the small, front bedroom and putting them up as twin beds in the back bedroom vacated by Rachel. Needless to say, this involved yet more cleaning and moving heavy items and the small, front bedroom became the latest junk room.

A brief respite came with a trip to the refuse disposal site in Bury to drop off two old mattresses that belonged to the adjustable beds, the beds themselves in storage in the garage. This was followed by the inevitable stop at Tesco on the return journey.

The preparation work, not to mention the cleaning, continued on Tuesday 20th May. I took time out to test and repair a few items. I had two sets of telephones from the Old School jumble I had not previously had time to inspect and I had brought them home in case I found time here before the next jumble sale on the coming Monday.

The first set of two hands-free telephones with answering machine had no power supply for the base unit. That was the end of those, at least for the time being.

The second set of four hands-free telephones with answering machine was missing a hand set. Of the remaining three, two worked. The third finally burst into life after I had replaced the rechargeable batteries for the second time, the first replacements, like the originals, being a bit like me – past their best.

I also checked out two web cameras with built-in microphones, Rachel had left behind, using Jenny's old laptop – once I had coaxed that back into life. The laptop didn't get used much and didn't like it. Bits of software were out of date and needed updating, not least the AVG Free anti-virus software that needed upgrading from the 2013 version to the latest 2014 version. Even then, Windows XP Security Center (it's American - what

else do you expect from Microsoft?) refused to accept that AVG existed, something I decided to look into later if I had the time.

Both web cameras worked perfectly and one of them was a very good Logitech HD camera with stereo sound, worth about £70 to £80. The cheaper camera was marked up for the car boot sale and the Logitech camera carefully boxed up and stored awaiting instruction from Rachel.

I then turned my attention to a multi-function car lamp we had acquired for our car boot stock and which I was going to keep for myself if it worked. The 12v power connector had become dislodged and I managed to fix it. I connected it up to the car power socket. It was fully operational and I put it away in the glove box.

I wasn't doing too badly was I? I should have known it couldn't last. Jenny decided it was time for my hair cut and talked me into performing this task on the patio where the mess didn't matter so much. I sat down in the chair and started to trim my hair as I usually do, with one minor deviation. I forgot to attach the guard that determines the length of the finished strands and shaved the middle of my head from my forehead, almost to the crown before I realised my mistake. Oh dear, I thought, or something similar.

I finished my hair and beard using the usual guides and Jenny trimmed the bits I couldn't reach, as she normally does, trying not to laugh too loudly. Our neighbour across the back commented that I wouldn't need to trim the bit in the middle next time.

On Wednesday 21st May, we turned our attention to our bedroom. Jenny had made a comment about cleaning the thick layer of dust on top of the wardrobes and since she couldn't reach it, she asked me to do it. Needless to say, it didn't stop there. Once she had me in the bedroom, I was there for the day. Lucky me. I was moving furniture, vacuuming, scrubbing mould off here and there, cleaning the window PVC and glass and hanging a clean set of curtains.

We had intended to continue on Thursday 22nd May but it was voting day and Jenny needed some greetings cards for up-coming birthdays. We walked round to the village general store cum pharmacy and I chatted to Keith, the pharmacist while Jenny picked out the cards she wanted. A quick trip back to the post box was followed by a brisk walk down to the Cricket Club to vote in the local and European elections, for all the good it would do.

Returning home, some Beaver administration work needed doing and typing on a keyboard required less effort than was required in the bedroom. Jenny did do some further tidying after lunch while I busied myself fixing a problem with the village web site.

In the evening, we went to help the new Thursday Beaver Leader, Harry, who had organised a cycle ride down the Kirklees Trail from Greenmount to Tottington and back. It all went very well, apart from the odd collision and, fortunately, the rain held off until we returned home.

On Friday 23rd May, we went grocery shopping, intending to buy enough groceries for the next couple of weeks, since we were expecting our visitors from New Zealand and Australia in a few days' time.

We dropped off some old pillows we no longer needed at the Old School for the jumble sale and then called to weigh in some old clothes for cash in Bury, not that the amount we received would cover the cost of the fuel to make the detour, on our way out. We lunched at Waitrose as usual, where I read the headline in the Telegraph about the government's push to encourage "Fracking" in the south of England and to undermine home owners (yes, the pun was intended) by changing the law to allow drilling to take place under people's homes without their permission.

I also read about Prince Charles comparing Putin to Hitler.

It occurred to me there was a tenuous connection between these two stories. While I stopped short of describing Putin as another Hitler, he was undoubtedly a bully, a man and a rich one at that, determined to have his own way. You can see where I'm going with this?

Cameron, our beloved Prime Minister, could be described as exactly the same. It then struck me (I had these flashes of inspiration from time to time) that this applied to all political leaders. If they weren't rich, weren't bullies and cared about people and the environment, let's face it, they wouldn't get to be leaders, would they? Is Obama any different? Is the Pope Jewish?

Back to the plot.

I went round with Jenny to help her run her Beaver session. My first of two tasks was to teach the Beavers a promise from another country, Canada, which is "I promise to love God and to help take care of the world". Obviously none of their leading politicians had been in the Scouts. My second was to teach the Beavers a greeting in a foreign language and I chose French. Merci et bonne nuit.

On Saturday 24th May we went round to the Old School to help with the jumble sale preparations and were there all day.

After tea, sitting in my armchair in the lounge, I had an encounter with a wasp and I came off worst. From whence it came I knew not but I knew where it went. It was firmly attached to my left arm just above the elbow as I felt a sharp jab after resting my arm on the chair. I have to say no blame was attached to the wasp; it was my fault for resting my bare arm on the creature whose presence I hadn't noticed. I felt at the site of the sting and pulled the wasp off my arm before I realised what it was. It was as stunned as was I. We went our separate ways as I went to sooth the pain with a tissue soaked in vinegar and the wasp crawled around my chair to recover from the shock. I eventually captured the poor creature in a humane bug-catcher and released it outside before going to bed, still nursing the after-effects of the experience.

On Sunday 25th May, our morning was spend rearranging the sleeping accommodation for our guests, due the following Tuesday. The afternoon saw us back at the Old School. It's all go in Greenmount.

Even more excitingly, I spent the morning of Monday 26th May scrubbing the kitchen and hall floors while Jenny cleaned the lounge. The cats helped to dirty the floor again, coming and going through the open, kitchen, patio doors.

After lunch, we were back at the Old School for the 2 p.m. jumble sale and that was followed by a trip to the tip (sounds like a game show) at 4 p.m. and more cleaning/tidying in preparation for our guests the following day.

On Tuesday 27th May, we were at the airport some twenty minutes after the flight arrival, having coped with a congested M60, thanks to drivers who didn't have enough collective cells to form a brain between them and a short-stay car park with very few places on the first two levels. Nevertheless, there was a delay in the passengers alighting from the Singapore Airlines flight, which had arrived twenty minutes early and passing through baggage collection and customs due, I was given to understand, to the previous flight taking longer than it should have to unload its passengers and cargo at the same gate.

Edith, Amy and Tor arrived in good spirits and looking well despite the long flight from Brisbane and we brought them home. They didn't stay long, as we headed out to Summerseat Garden Centre for lunch and then to Tesco (where else?) in Bury.

Wednesday 28th May was a bit of a recovery day, spent locally in Bury and, after returning home for lunch, in Ramsbottom.

We all headed off to Sheffield on Thursday 29th May, meeting up with Ann, my and Edith's cousin and her husband, Trevor at their home and then the seven of us had a very nice lunch at The Bistro in the village of Wentworth. That was followed by a trip to meet Ann's sister, Jean and her husband Harry, twelve years having lapsed since Edith and I last met with our cousins in Sheffield.

After that, we took Amy, Edith's granddaughter, to see where Edith grew up, in Hillsborough, including a brief stop at Hillsborough Park and a quick visit to the Sheffield Wednesday ground entrance, followed by a visit to Wadsley Parish Church, where Edith was married. The door to the church was locked and, just as we were leaving, a chap arrived to open up and we went for a look round inside.

We had arranged to meet another relative, Terry's (Edith's late husband's) cousin, Rodger, where they used to live in Dunella Road and we both arrived there at the same time, Rodger having brought his Taiwanese wife, Sana (apologies to them both if the spelling of her name is wrong). After a brief chat, they invited us back to their house for tea and Sana cooked a lovely, oriental meal for us all.

We left, having had a most fulfilling day, about 9:30 p.m., reflecting on the kindness, generosity and hospitality extended to us by lovely people we rarely see or have never met face-to-face before.

On Friday 30th May, we went to York, mainly for Amy and Tor's benefit to experience something of English heritage, not that much can be achieved in a few hours. York is one of those cities that requires several days to appreciate its appeal and, unfortunately, our guests' time was limited. They were both impressed as they wandered off to explore York Minster, the shops and narrow streets and Clifford Tower while we oldies were left to potter about, have lunch and chat.

We were back in Greenmount on Saturday 31st May and a morning trip to Unicorn for a few bits and pieces, followed by lunch at home and preparation for the evening meal

with Matthew and Carrie and Rachel at Automatic in Bury. We arranged a taxi to Bury and hopped into a taxi home to give the driver, namely me, a rest and an opportunity to sample their delicious elderflower blonde, meeting Matthew and Carrie there.

What an exciting and eventful few days we had to round off the month, and this was just the beginning, as you will see in the next thrilling instalment.